A Little Help from Your Friends

By Matt Sernett
Illustration by Craig J. Spearing

When you create your character, you no doubt spend a lot of time on game elements such as race, class, feats, and powers. You probably consider the personality you're going to roleplay as you assign ability scores, and you might formulate a background story to suit your character. You might even consider your character's family and the place your character lived before setting off on a life of adventure.

Yet how often do you think about your character's friends?

A social game such as DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® *can help you form strong bonds of friendship, so you know how important friends can be in shaping how you behave, what you believe, and how you look at the world. Yet even as you formed friendships before you met everyone around the game table, your character should have had friendships before meeting the other characters.*

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Some Friendly Advice

Your character might have friends just like yours, but Dungeons & Dragons is a game of heroism and fantasy, so your character's friends can be larger than life. Consider the friendships you've seen in fiction, be it the movies, comic books, TV shows, plays, or novels. Does your Frodo have a Samwise? Is your character the Riggs or the Murtaugh from the *Lethal Weapon* movies? Did you have a *Young Guns* gang of pals or a group of buddies like *The Goonies*?

Consider the ideas below the next time you create a character, or use them as elements you can add to the character you play now. Use them as inspiration for the roleplaying fun you'd like to have during the game. The friend ideas you come up with might be one of those below, a combination of them, or something unique to you.

You can introduce friends of your character to the game at any time, just like you might acquaint an old friend with a group of new ones you've made in real life. See "Introducing Friends to Your DM" below for how to broach the topic with your pal who runs the game.

With Friends Like These

Your friend is always getting you into trouble. It's not intentional, but he or she says the wrong thing at the wrong time or drags you into yet another fine mess. Plans go awry, good ideas turn out to be terrible, and when it all hits the fan, you're the one who has to clean up the mess. Some folks would ditch your buddy, but you've been through a lot together, and he or she means well and is not always wrong.

Overeager Youth: This young friend idolizes you and wants to be part of your adventures. The overeager youth gets you into trouble by getting in over her head and being ignorant of the lessons life has taught you.

Klutz: The klutz is a fine friend—great to talk to, full of good advice, and an all-around nice person—you just can't let him near anything sharp, or allow him near a window, or let him cross the street alone. The klutz works things out when you're not around, but around you the accidents seem endless.

Ne'er-Do-Well: Mischievous isn't the right word. Devilish maybe. Irksome definitely. Your ne'er-do-well friend can't seem to help sticking her nose where it doesn't belong, throwing a wrench in the works, and otherwise making a nuisance of herself. It's exasperating, but sometimes you can't help but laugh. Besides, she doesn't mean any harm.

Keep Your Enemies Closer

You know how the adage goes. You need to know your foes' moves before they do, and how better to do that than become their friend? When the time is right, you'll strike. Then again, you know what they say about the enemy of your enemies. Maybe this is the beginning of something beautiful.

Rival: You've been competing against your acquaintance since you were both young. You competed in work, in play, for the affection of a lover, and for the attention of friends. It's never stopped. Sometimes you win. Sometimes your rival gets the upper hand. But it's all just friendly competitiveness—or at least that's what you tell yourself.

Arch Un-Enemy: You now rely upon your one-time foe as an ally. Circumstances forced you to trust one another, and you can do nothing but grin and bear it. Besides, he's not all bad. Maybe there's hope for him yet. Of course, that doesn't mean you'll let your guard down.

Former Friend: You were best friends. You couldn't imagine anything coming between you, but then something did. Maybe it was money. Maybe it was someone else. Maybe it shouldn't have mattered, but it did. Now everything has changed and you can't see a way to fix it, but that doesn't mean you won't try.

We're Just Friends

You're the best of friends, and when people look at you both together, they naturally see you as, well, *together*. But it's not like that—at least, you don't think it is. You're just friends. Really.

Childhood Love: You "dated" when you were young, but that was years ago. It was childish and naïve. You're past that now. Both of you moved on and met other people, but you've become really good friends. You have a lot of fond memories, though, and you have jokes that no one else gets. It all turned out for the best.

Your Ex: You had something once, and it was great then, but things didn't work out. You fought too much. Your lives were heading in different directions. Of course, now that you've met your ex again, you wonder if maybe things could have been different. Maybe *this* time can be different.

She's Like a Sister: You've known her for years. She's your best friend's little sister, your little sister's best friend, or just a buddy you made while working. You've never thought of her as anything other than a friend.

Fair-Weather Friends

Some friends are with you through thick and thin, and then there's your friend. When you need someone to get your back, you see your friend's back as she runs away. Most of the time your friend apologizes, but she doesn't need to. It's just who she is, and you've come to accept it.

Coward: Your friend is ready to stand beside you right up until things look dangerous. When the going gets tough, he's already gone.

Flake: She just doesn't think! She's always late—if she makes it at all. She forgets important events, loses things, and gets distracted. Every now and then, though, she surprises you by coming through when you least expect it.

Selfish: Your friend is a good guy. Really, he is. Sure, sometimes he's a bit of a jerk, but isn't everybody? Of course, you can't trust him if money is involved, but who can you really trust with that kind of thing? Your friend might be selfish or greedy sometimes, but you forgive and forget. That's what friendship is all about.

A Friend in High (or Low) Places

You have a friend in a radically different social stratum. Maybe you grew up on the wrong side of the tracks and made friends with someone from the other side. Perhaps you became best friends with your whipping boy despite your pampered upbringing. Maybe you grew up a criminal but in your many trips to jail made friends with the guards.

Mover and Shaker: Your friend has political power, and lots of it. Of course, she can't be seen to use it in your favor, but sometimes she can make folks look the other way. Someday you'll be able to return all the favors.

Ear on the Streets: Your friend lives a hard life on the streets, but he makes it look easy. He's not above accepting a little help now and then, but he never takes charity and always gives you some help in return.

Criminal Who Owes You One: You saved a criminal's life, and now she's determined to repay that debt. She's a rough sort, but handy to have around in a scrap. Her methods aren't always orthodox—or even legal—but it gets the job done. You just hope you can convince her the debt is paid before you both end up in jail.

Introducing Friends to Your DM

Obviously, you can't roleplay both your character and the friend. Leave that fun for the DM. Yet to meet the friends you create for your character, you need to tell your DM about them and gain permission to use them in the game. Even better, make your DM and other players excited about the concept so that the table can come alive with the world of characters you all create.

Plenty of DMs like players to help out more with the story and give them more to work with when creating adventure ideas and character plots. Bringing your character's friends to the table gives you a way to influence those plots while providing the DM with things he or she knows can engage you.

When bringing a nonplayer character friend to the table, you can define the start of your relationship with your friend, but where it goes after that is up to you and your DM to discover through roleplaying. You can't give your DM an idea for your friend and then cry foul when the character makes a choice you don't like or the DM roleplays the friend differently from the way you would.

The best chance to have the kinds of experiences you want from interacting with a friend is to give the DM a great description at the beginning. Relating all you can think of about an imaginary person can be difficult, so you might instead relate your thoughts in terms of characters both you and your DM know well. Maybe your character's ex-lover is a pirate captain, but you describe her as "a female James Bond in attitude, and her first mate is a gruff dwarf artificer who provides her with gadgets." Once you've encapsulated your friends in this manner, your DM can take it from there.

Now go have fun with your friends—real or imaginary!

About the Author

Matt Sernett is a writer and game designer for Wizards of the Coast who has worked on both Dungeons & Dragons and Magic: The Gathering. Recent credits include *Monster Vault*, *Neverwinter Campaign Guide*, and *Scars of Mirrodin* for Magic: the Gathering. When he's not making monsters or building worlds, he's watching bad fantasy movies you don't realize exist and shouldn't bother to learn about.

Channel Divinity: Vecna

By Robert J. Schwalb
Illustrations by Howard Lyon and Craig J Spearing

Devotees of the Maimed One

"Yet we have not forgotten. The time for benevolent demonstration is over. Vecna's legacy demands true rebellion. These deities have massacred every belief we hold dear. They have banished our lord and despoiled his name. The only way to show them the nature of their evil is to commit our own acts of despicable villainy. Then they will see their own evil reflected in our actions."

–The Scroll of Mauthereign

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Searchers for meaning in the cosmos rarely let their wandering eyes linger upon the Maimed One. Vecna's name alone evokes terror in those who hear it. The tales concerning the dark god are filled with necromancy and pain, betrayal, and evil perhaps in its purest form. As a mortal, Vecna proved willing to do things none of his contemporaries dared. He was the first to sacrifice his body to gain immortality as a lich. He used his magic to raise up an army of undead and conquer an empire. He was betrayed, dismembered, and swallowed up by the Shadowfell to fight a war against his one-time companion and eternal rival for eons. And eventually, he stole divine power for himself to complete his apotheosis and become the god of secrets, the undead, and necromancy.

How then could anyone unsullied by darkness turn to the Whispered One for guidance and council? How could any reasonable mortal embrace the darkness that is Vecna? How could a heroic adventurer reconcile courageous and bold action with service to such a despicable master?

Without a doubt Vecna is evil, and those in service to him are cut from the same cloth. After all, Vecna is the god of undeath. His evil is the stuff of nightmare and his efforts to enfold the world in a necromantic grip have been ceaseless, predating his plunge into corruption. Yet for all that Vecna embodies the darkness, he is also the god of secrets, the lord of whispers, and the keeper of forbidden knowledge. Given the wickedness at large in the world, almost anyone would agree that some things should remain hidden—that certain truths should be left undiscovered. It is in this capacity that some unlikely individuals find their paths intersecting with those of light's champions to keep secret what should never be revealed.

The Truth?

The truth has never been important to Vecna's followers. Or, rather, the truth is something they see as mutable, something they can bend to serve their interests. And if it means changing the facts about their god and his rise to power, so be it.

The trouble with Vecna's followers is that secrecy is the all-important objective in everything they do. It is better to further their designs from the shadows than to risk another confrontation with the hated foes found in other gods' servants. To make matters worse, followers of Vecna are under no obligation to work together. Many priests work in isolation, building small cults of likeminded and loyal followers. Isolation and truth's mutability ensure each sect has particular ideas about their god's identity and what it means to serve the Whispered One in the world.

Certain facts are true to every strain of Vecna worship. Vecna was once a mortal of great magical power. Magical mastery enabled Vecna to secure temporal power, with the assistance of his companion Kas. At some point during his ascent, he created the Lich Transformation ritual, then became a lich, and finally authored the *Book of Vile Darkness*. Not long after or maybe during this time, Kas betrayed him and nearly destroyed him. Vecna was dismembered and scattered. His soul, too heavy from wickedness, would not discorporate and instead reclaimed all the missing pieces of his body but his hand and eye. His triumph over death allowed him to complete his transformation and become the god he always wanted to be.

The order of these events, Vecna's identity before his rise to power, explanations for the betrayal, and just how exactly Vecna became a god are all subjects for debate and have proved instrumental to keeping the various factions at each others' throats from the moment Vecna came to power. Some believe, as recounted in the Scroll of Mauthereign, the gods themselves feared and hated Vecna, persecuting him for his brilliance and powers. Others have claimed Vecna was the mortal offspring of He Who Was and in him was entrusted the very hope for the world. Then again, there are tales about how Vecna was born to a despicable witch who showed him the path to darkness before she was herself cast into a pyre by righteous zealots. Kas might have been a redeemer, freeing Vecna from Nerull's influence, or he could have been a villain without peer, a traitor and blackguard who coveted Vecna's power. Too many variations exist for anyone to discover the actual truth and this is just how the Maimed One wants it.

Keeping the circumstances about his rise to power secret ensures no one can replicate them. As well, mortals invent far more elaborate tales about Vecna than what could have happened. The more fantastical the fabrication, the greater and more dreadful Vecna becomes. Finally, Vecna's past is really unimportant when it comes to understanding the god and his interests in the world. Myth and legend are sufficient explanations for his ascent and their fanciful embellishments just reinforce how unique a figure he must have been to become something greater than that to which he was born.

The Whispered Commandments

Although there are factions beyond counting in service to the Whispered One, all cleave to certain commandments laid out for them in the most ancient scrolls. These essential demands dictate how Vecna expects his followers to behave, what they should do in service to him, and, ultimately, give purpose to their lives. Vecna's basic commandments are as follows.

Follow the Subtle Path: Enemies abound. Ostentatious displays invite their attention. Reveal nothing about yourself and never offer more information than is required. Hold back all that you can because secret knowledge gives you power over others. Vecna knows your spirit, so never risk yourself or your gains by revealing your devotion to nonbelievers.

Nurture the Seed of Darkness: Search your heart, your mind, and your body for darkness and surrender to its power. Let the shadow consume you, fill you with its perfect darkness, and guide your actions in the world.

Those who shine brightest cast the darkest shadows. Corruption's potential is your greatest ally. Locate darkness's seed in those around you. Nurture it until the evil flourishes. Once your subject is in its throes, he or she will be powerless to resist you and become your obedient thrall.

Reject All Gods but Vecna: The Maimed God is the one true god of all gods. All others are lesser godlings, sycophants, and pretenders. They win mortal affection through trickery and fraud. Reject them and go forth confident in Vecna's favor.

Scorn the priests who prostrate at the altars to the false gods. Trust them not because they covet the blessings Vecna bestows on you. Oppose their efforts lest they steal from you what you have earned.

Servants of Darkness

The relationship between an individual and his or her god is purely subjective. Remember, the world of *Dungeons & Dragons*® is a polytheistic one. Mortals from all races regard the gods as one body, a group populated with virtuous and shining individuals in whose shadows lurk the sinister, scheming, and corrupt. A petitioner might invoke many gods in the same prayer, beseeching the good or evil deity to intercede in those areas the god influences. Vecna, for all his obvious wickedness, has a place among mortals and the prayers he receives come from dark intent. An adulterous man might offer a sacrifice to Vecna to keep his affair secret. A conspiracy to overthrow a tyrannical government might also call to the Maimed One to shroud their meetings in secrecy. A murderer might sketch the hand and eye in a victim's blood to ask the Whispered One to hide the wicked deed.

Vecna's servants are a reprehensible lot. Suspicious to the point of paranoid delusion, they veil themselves in secrecy. They retreat to the dark places in the world, hiding their religious devotion behind many different masks, sometimes living and working alongside right-minded people. Most are hard-lined fanatics, cleaving to the ancient lore passed down to them in sacred scrolls. They view any deviation from these texts as dangerous invention and regard those who cling to those beliefs as liabilities to their work.

These followers form an evil society. They scour the lands for forbidden knowledge and hoard it, perusing the filthy texts for secrets they can use to grow their own power. Most followers are versed in necromantic magic and rely on undead servants as guardians or companions.

Vecna's agenda is anathema to mortals. Snuffing out life and animating the remains to become undead thralls is not something many folks are eager to embrace. Still, people are sworn to the Maimed One all the time, giving their lives to bring about the dark future as promised by their master. Most are castoffs, freaks, and insane—misguided souls who have been duped into believing the lies foisted on them by Vecna's demagogues. Others see Vecna as a means to an end and as a vehicle to grow their own power. Whatever their reasons, once sworn to the Whispered One's service there is no escape.

Book of Vile Darkness

The greatest and most enduring evil loosed upon the world is the *Book of Vile Darkness*. It's believed Vecna authored the work in the days before Kas maimed and nearly destroyed him. In it, Vecna recorded all the dark lore and knowledge he discovered in his mortal life, from dealings with demons to bargains made with devils. He advanced necromancy by leaps and bounds, revealed the alien powers living among the stars, and even included a ritual to breach the boundaries of the mortal world. Vecna never intended this lore to spread beyond his own library, but was powerless to halt its dissemination after the betrayal. Since then, the Book has become an artifact, appearing at various points in history to create much confusion and despair wherever and whenever it surfaces. Many cultists of Vecna make it their life's work to claim the book for themselves, either to lock it away or to awaken its true power.

Keepers of the Forbidden Lore

As terrible a force as Vecna can be, not everything associated with the god is evil. Vecna might be the god of undead, but he is also the god of secrets and he charges his followers with safeguarding dangerous and forbidden lore, to keep it hidden at all costs. Most followers of Vecna see this command as license to delve deeply into forbidden magic, but a more nuanced reading reveals that perhaps even Vecna understands some things are best kept secret.

Although Vecna would conquer the world and reduce its people to undead servants, he has no interest in seeing the Far Realm spill madness into the world or a demonic horde vomited up from the Abyss to lay waste to creation. Vecna does not want Nerull to return to power, nor does he want the Chained God freed from his Abyssal prison. Any threat to the world's survival denies him his ultimate goal, so it is in his best interest to ensure certain ideas, spells, rituals, and their ilk remain secret. Thus Vecna compels his followers to stifle anything they find that could imperil the world. They are to gather up this lore and secure it in the deepest, darkest vaults where Ioun's contemptible light can never fall.

The Keepers of the Forbidden Lore are a tiny sect as ancient and as storied as any other sect associated with Vecna. Contemporaries of Vecna when he walked the world as a lich, they were enforcers charged with gathering dangerous lore and returning it to him, whereupon he studied and perhaps compiled it in the *Book of Vile Darkness*. The Keepers survived Vecna's dismemberment and fall and continued their work in the long ages that followed.

Outside of a few orthodox sects, most followers of Vecna are not even aware the Keepers exist. Like their rivals, they value secrecy in their dealings, working from the shadows to gather up dangerous knowledge and to destroy those who would put into action the ideas such lore contains. Unlike other followers, the Keepers have opted not to take a side in the struggle between good and evil, and instead see it as their holy duty to protect the world from dangerous ideas. When Vecna returns, they plan to give to the dark god the works they have compiled to do with as he wills. Until this day comes, the Keepers are ready and willing to lay down their lives to prevent such dark knowledge from leaving their control.

The Keepers have few allies in the world. Other followers see them as heretics, strange and untrustworthy since the Keepers reject most of the nastier rituals and ceremonies that make Vecna's followers so despicable. The Keepers also have trouble with Ioun since the god and her followers seem unable to recognize how dangerous a game they play. Many of Ioun's followers believe all information should be available for study, no matter how dangerous such knowledge might be. The idea is that it isn't the information that's dangerous, but how it is used. Thus the moral obligation to not use that knowledge falls squarely on the shoulders of the person who studies it.

As one might expect, the Keepers have little use for that kind of evasion and know from great experience that knowledge can be neutral, but it can also be uplifting or destructive. And so, the Keepers infiltrate Ioun's temples when possible, stealing the more dubious manuscripts or killing those who might use them for dark ends until the work can be contained.

Serving Vecna

Serving Vecna means a life spent in shadows. Every action and every effort you make are lies told to conceal your true loyalties from those who don't understand or who oppose your patron. You cling to your secrets, guarding your knowledge against discovery, even if it means causing trouble for your comrades. You are unafraid to peer into the darkness because it merely reflects the poison coursing through your mortal soul.

As an unaligned devotee, you might approach your faith from a pragmatic perspective. Vecna is a distant patron who lends you power in exchange for your service. You follow the principles put forward by your god, but you are not above making creative interpretations to mitigate their darker results. For example, you might focus on opposing specific gods such as the Raven Queen, Zehir, or Asmodeus, while holding other gods in a general disdain. Likewise, actively seeking to corrupt your companions might not be your style, but you would never stop an ally from indulging in his or her bad behavior, and then using that behavior to your advantage later.

Creating a Follower of Vecna

When creating a servant of Vecna, it's important to keep the following ideas and options in mind.

Class

Not all player characters who choose Vecna as their god are members of a divine class. Vecna has strong ties to the shadow power source and thus most of his worshipers follow in his steps and dabble in darkness. Assassins, mages, and warlocks are all common.

For divine classes, Vecna can create some complications, especially when it comes to alignment. Most divine classes expect the character's alignment to match that possessed by the god. So if you want to play an invoker or paladin (other than a cavalier), you must choose the evil alignment. Avengers and clerics have a bit more flexibility, letting you choose unaligned or evil. Two classes stand out as exceptions. Warpriests (from *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*) and runepriests can have any alignment regardless of the god they serve. However, you need to come up with a good reason for being good while serving such an obviously evil god.

Race

Members of any race might find cause to pledge service to the Maimed One, though humans are the most common people to follow Vecna. Vecna was human before he became a lich and his traditions, values, and culture all find their origins in the human race. Revenants might also serve Vecna, if only as a way to understand their undead status. Devas and most fey races have little interest in this dark god.

Skills and Skill Powers

As a follower of the god of secrets, you can demonstrate your affiliation with the god by taking training in knowledge skills or by swapping out utility powers for skill powers associated with the knowledge skills. Look at Arcana, History, and Religion first since these areas are the ones that best reflect Vecna's interests.

Feats

In addition to the new feats described below, Vecna's followers favor feats associated with divine devotion, learning and lore, and any feats associated with shadow, such as those described in *Heroes of Shadow.* In particular, Disciple of Death, Disciple of Lore, and Disciple of Shadow *(Heroes of the Fallen Lands)* strongly reflect the boons Vecna might grant to particularly cherished followers.

Class Features and Powers

When choosing powers for your character, focus on those that conceal or deceive other creatures, such as those with the illusion keyword. Attack powers that deal necrotic damage are also important, as are any powers that create undead or draw from the shadow power source. With your DM's permission, you might also adapt existing powers, changing the keywords and damage type from radiant to either necrotic or psychic.

Alignment and Final Details

It bears repeating: Most mortals who worship Vecna are evil and as such they make poor adventurers. The rare unaligned follower of Vecna doesn't dare reveal his or her loyalties to keep from inviting persecution from the god's enemies. What drew you to

the Whispered One? Most player characters who follow Vecna find the Keepers of the Forbidden Lore a strong option for reconciling their loyalties with being a heroic force in the world. The sect makes few demands on its members and downplays Vecna's evil aspects, while working toward a positive end in the world. In this way, the most virtuous cavaliers might debate the means, but have a hard time arguing against the end.

If you opt not to be affiliated with that sect, what is your story? How do you come to terms with your god's dark nature and your responsibilities in the world? Is Vecna a means to an end? Do you hope to follow in his steps? Do you serve Vecna out of hatred for another god, such as the Raven Queen or Zehir? Do you conceal your religious affiliation, or do you risk your life by professing your devotion to what is often regarded as one of the most evil deities in the pantheon? When confronted by an enemy of your god, how do you react?

Although it's advised you stick with being unaligned, serving Vecna does suggest an evil alignment. Be warned that even when they are made up of like-minded companions, evil adventuring parties rarely find success. Betrayals and interparty treachery take their toll, and in almost every case the entire enterprise dissolves in a bloody internecine power struggle. As always, before you create an evil adventurer, be sure to talk it over with your Dungeon Master and your fellow players to ensure that your character choice can fit within the larger group without being overly disruptive.

New Heroic Tier Feats

The Whispered One claims dominion over undead and secrets. Those who follow him and champion the spheres he controls find their patron offers bountiful rewards. The following feats help tailor divine characters to better fit as Vecna's servants.

Divinity Feats
Command Undead

Vecna Feats
Corrupting Presence
Hasten the Rot
Master of Secrets
Touched by Darkness
Vecna's Final Command

Command Undead

Vecna claims dominion over all undead creatures and extends his dark authority to those who serve him.

Prerequisite: A channel divinity power that targets undead from your class, and you must worship Vecna.

Benefit: You gain the *command undead* power.

Command Undead Feat Attack

You compel an undead creature to become your slave for a time.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Implement, Shadow
Standard Action Close burst 5 (10 at 21st level)
Target: One undead creature in the burst
Attack: Wisdom vs. Will
Hit: You slide the target up to a number of squares equal to 3 + your primary ability modifier. The target then becomes immobilized until the end of your next turn. Any creature that ends its turn adjacent to the target takes 5 damage.
Level 11: 10 damage.
Level 21: 20 damage.
Miss: The target is dazed until the end of your next turn.

Corrupting Presence

Vecna favors you with a shadowy mantle that appears whenever you draw from the darkness to fuel your attacks.

Prerequisite: Any divine class, must worship Vecna

Benefit: When you use a divine encounter or daily attack power that has the necrotic keyword, you can create a zone in a close burst 1. The zone lasts until the end of your next turn. Bright light in the zone becomes dim light. Allies in the zone gain a +1 power bonus to attack rolls with necrotic powers.

Hasten the Rot

Undead creatures sense Vecna's favor around you. When you strike them, they cringe from you in fear of displeasing your dark master.

Prerequisite: Any divine class, must worship Vecna

Benefit: Undead enemies hit by your divine encounter attack powers and daily attack powers that have the necrotic keyword also become slowed until the end of your next turn.

Master of Secrets

Your knowledge of secrets imparts a power useful toward completing your quests.

Prerequisite: Any divine class, must worship Vecna

Benefit: You can choose skill powers associated with Arcana, Dungeoneering, History, Nature, and Religion as if you were trained in those skills.

Touched by Darkness

Your study of the forbidden has stained your soul.

Prerequisite: Any divine class, must worship Vecna

Benefit: Whenever you use a divine attack power with the necrotic keyword, your attack ignores the first 5 points of necrotic resistance the target has.

Vecna's Final Command [Divinity]

Necromantic power is yours to command. You can channel divine energy to briefly animate a dying creature and exact a final service from it.

Prerequisite: Any channel divinity power, must worship Vecna

Benefit: You gain the *Vecna's final command* power.

Vecna's Final Command Feat Utility

You hold death back to allow the dying one final attack.

Encounter ✦ Channel Divinity, Divine
Immediate Interrupt **Close** burst 5
Trigger: A creature in the burst drops to 0 hit points.
Target: The triggering creature
Effect: The target makes a basic attack against a creature you choose.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed nearly two hundred roleplaying game titles for Dungeons & Dragons, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars RPG*, and the *d20 system*. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *D&D® Gamma World: Famine in Far-Go*, *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, and in *Monster Manual 3*. Also, he's a regular contributor to both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. For more information about the author, be sure to check out his website at www.robertjschwalb.com.

Character Concepts

Primal Spirits of Athas

By David Adams

Illustrations by Wayne England, Adam Paquette, and David Rapoza

The primal spirits of Athas are far from benevolent. The power of the forces that ravaged Athas transcends the mortal world. Although the tragic vanishing of the Lands Within the Wind might be the most salient example of this, even the most compassionate spirits have become watchful and wary because of the devastation the world endured from defiling arcane magic. The act of defiling warped many primal spirits, either leaving them insensate or filling them with fury. Others have suffered torment, imprisonment, and even destruction as the power of the sorcerer-kings rose unchecked.

Despite the danger inherent in drawing the primal spirits' attention, many people still venerate these warped spirits and willingly invoke their power. Desperation, fear, and ignorance are common motives, but the heroes of Athas are complex. By entreating the primal spirits detailed below, characters tread the fine line between heroism and villainy that exists in the unforgiving world beneath the dark sun.

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Forest Father

The Forest Father is a spirit of many names: Tree Father, World Tree, First Forest, and many more. During the Green Age, he planted the Trees of Life. They were conduits for his verdant compassion and the seeds of the mighty forests that covered Athas during that time. Now, a portion of Forest Father's essence withers each time a Tree of Life is used by a sorcerer-king or other defiler. This once-mighty spirit is being bled out of existence little by little, and as his vitality is spent, so too are his mind and memory being lost.

The pockets of forest that still exist on Athas are jealously guarded by Forest Father. The genocidal Cleansing Wars waged by the sorcerer-kings pushed many species to extinction but failed to eradicate the spirits that tethered those creatures to the world. Forest Father gathered these wandering spirits under his care, to soothe the wounds left by the conflict and to protect the world from the bestial instincts they were left with. They are The Lost, and they now dwell within Forest Father's secluded domains.

Forest Father is fiercely opposed to change. His devotees teach that change is an avenue for disrespect; it taints tradition and order in the same way that defiling magic overturned the natural order of the world.

On the island of Shault in the Sea of Silt, the powerful druid Mearedes is often called "little grandmother" by the residents of that remote place. Few outsiders realize that this is because the primal spirit who guards the island is known as the Grandfather Oak. The spirit encourages islanders to venerate ancient traditions, maintain age-old rites, and be wary of outsiders. Any who violate these cultural norms are punished. Like the Shault islanders, those who honor Forest Father have little compassion or mercy for those who defile the land. Having endured centuries of anguish and the constant whittling-away of defiling, Forest Father no longer retains enough of his wits to urge restraint on his followers.

Those most willing to take up the cause of Forest Father are likely to be seekers (*Player's Handbook* 3). They routinely pledge a Spiritbond to this fading spirit, using powers that create plant growth to protect the land itself and those who would protect the land. They are often drawn to the life of primal guardian (*Dark Sun Campaign Setting*), and many go on to become a guardian of the land (*Dark Sun Campaign Setting*).

For all his cruelty, Forest Father is still a spirit of growth and renewal. Many life wardens draw their power from this spirit. The mightiest of them become verdant lords (*Player's Handbook 2*). Shamans can evoke the power of Forest Father with *tree father's bounty* and *tree father's ward* (*Primal Power*).

Though Forest Father clings but thinly to rational thought, he is capable of bestowing blessings on those who please him or perform great services. *Verdant presence* and *primeval vigor* are his rewards. They are suitable for characters who thwart powerful defilers, restore sizable areas of natural life, or who befriend and impress Mearedes.

BACKGROUND: NIGHTMARES OF DEFILING

Characters who wish to venerate Forest Father or be attuned to his vision of the world can choose the Nightmares of Defiling background.

Nightmares of Defiling: During the Cleansing Wars, the sorcerer-kings systematically exterminated many of the races that dwelt on Athas. They ravaged the land and broke the world with their defiling magic. You are plagued by nightmares of those terrible deeds. These unrelenting visions have filled you with certitude that all defilers must be stopped and the land restored.

Associated Skills: Intimidate, Nature

Personal Quests: Locate and safeguard a tree of life; travel to Shault and learn the secrets of Forest Father from Mearedes; topple a sorcerer-king from the throne.

Verdant Presence — Level 5+ Uncommon

The power of the Forest Father flows through you, causing the land to flourish in your presence. With his blessing you can bind your enemies with this abundant growth.

Level 5 1,000 gp
Level 15 25,000 gp
Level 25 625,000 gp

Primal Blessing

Power (Daily ✦ Zone): Minor action. *Effect:* You create a zone of difficult terrain in a close burst 1 that lasts until the end of the encounter. On each of your turns, you can take a standard action to make the following attack against an enemy in the zone.

Attack: Primary ability +2 vs. Reflex

Hit: The target is immobilized until the start of your next turn.

Level 15: The zone is a close burst 2, and the attack is primary ability +4 vs. Reflex.

Level 25: The zone is a close burst 3, and the attack is primary ability +6 vs. Reflex.

Primeval Vigor — Level 7+ Uncommon

The vitality of the creatures massacred during the Cleansing Wars flows through you as your draw on primal energy to transform your body.

Level 7 2,600 gp
Level 17 65,000 gp
Level 27 1,625,000 gp

Primal Blessing

Power (Encounter): Free action. *Trigger:* You use a primal power with the polymorph keyword. *Effect:* You gain temporary hit points equal to 2 + your Constitution modifier.

Level 17: 5 + Constitution modifier hit points.

Level 27: 10 + Constitution modifier hit points.

Silver Wind

Silver Wind was once a gentle spirit of rains. Decades ago, the sorcerer-queen Lalali-puy subdued and bound this powerful primal spirit to further her intentions for Gulg. The torment of imprisonment hardened the heart of Silver Wind and transformed it into a terrible spirit of unforgiving vengeance. When Lalali-puy uses this spirit to bring rain to her people, Silver Wind unleashes damaging winds and floods instead. This small vengeance only furthers the sorcerer-queen's assertions that the primal spirits are cruel and dangerous.

Under the direction of the Oba, many of the nganga study the primal spirits. Druids, shamans, and barbarians number among these templars. The most powerful are initiated into secretive groups that pass on the vile rituals that keep the primal spirits around Gulg bound or sequestered in solitude. These unconventional templars exploit the power of spirits held captive by the Oba; many of them use Silver Wind's strength to learn powerful evocations of storm and wind. Thunderborn barbarians may be the shock troopers of Gulg, but stormcaller shamans (*Dragon* #385) and storm speaker druids (*Primal Power*) are the most terrifying members of the nganga.

BACKGROUND: SPIRIT BINDER

Characters who studied in Gulg and were accepted into the ranks of the nganga can choose the Spirit Binder background.

Spirit Binder: The nganga of Gulg are taught that the primal spirits desire the destruction of their city. The most gifted among them are instructed in the art of spirit binding so that they can marshal the spirits that the Oba has enslaved to defend Gulg and its residents. You are one of the templars of Gulg who has learned the esoteric techniques to bend primal spirits to your service. As long as you remain faithful to your duty, you can expect to rise in the Oba's favor.

Associated Skills: Arcana, Nature

Personal Quests: Subdue and entrap minor primal spirits; gain the notice of the Oba through your mastery of primal magic; locate Lalali-puy's bone village and tap its power.

Despite the binding that prevents Silver Wind from exercising her power, she still imbues chosen followers with a fragment of power. These storm wardens call upon powerful winds, crashing lightning, and thunderous gales by using feats such as Roiling Storm, Storm's Lightning, and Gusting Rebuke (*Dragon* 383) to overcome Silver Wind's foes. Those who look only for vengeance become storm sentinels (*Player's Handbook 2*), but others are beckoned by Silver Wind's gentler nature to become children of the north wind (*Primal Power*). These wardens protect others who venerate Silver Wind, such as shamans who follow the path to being a disciple of winds (*Primal Power*) and elemental priest rainbringers (*Dark Sun Campaign Setting*).

BACKGROUND: SILVER WIND'S ENVOY

Silver Wind has many enemies among the nganga, but she also has friends among those who resist the Oba's skulking agents. Characters who oppose Lalali-puy's crusade against the primal spirits can choose the Silver Wind's Envoy background.

Silver Wind's Envoy: You have been called by Silver Wind to end her imprisonment. The harsh winds of the desert deliver her missives to you, and terrible storms follow in your wake when you deliver vengeance to Silver Wind's enemies. Gulg is the primary battleground of this conflict, and you must be cunning and cautious if you hope to survive.

Associated Skills: Bluff, Stealth

Personal Quests: Place spies among the nganga or infiltrate it yourself; liberate potent primal spirits from the ngangas' bonds; locate Lalali-puy's bone village and release the enslaved spirits to break her power.

Adventurers who earn the favor of Lalali-puy might be granted her boon, *curse of the Oba*. She is most likely to bestow it on characters who serve her as ngangas or judagas, or who have the spirit binder background, but anyone is eligible whose treatment of primal spirits earns her approval.

Curse of the Oba Level 12

Lalali-Puy has taught you how to use the primal spirits to drain the vitality of an enemy.

Sorcerer-King's Boon 13,000 gp

Power (Daily ✦ Necrotic): Minor action. One enemy within 5 squares of you is blighted (save ends). While blighted and within 10 squares of you, that enemy takes necrotic damage the first time on each of your turns that you deal damage to a creature other than that enemy. The damage equals 2 + your Wisdom modifier.

Characters who challenge Lalali-puy, her agents, or others like them can earn the gratitude of Silver Wind. She is cautious about extending trust but generous to those who merit it. *Silver Wind's vengeance* is a suitable reward for outstanding service.

Silver Wind's Vengeance Level 13+ Uncommon

As you call upon the power of the storm, Silver Wind lends fury to your attack.

Level 13 17,000 gp Level 23 425,000 gp

Primal Blessing

Property: You gain a +3 item bonus to Intimidate.

Power (Daily ✦ Lightning, Thunder): Free action. *Trigger:* You hit a target with a lightning or thunder attack. *Effect:* You deal 5 + your Strength modifier extra lightning and thunder damage to the target, and push the target up to 2 squares. In addition, the target is dazed until the start of your next turn.

Level 23: You gain a +5 item bonus to Intimidate. You deal 10 + Strength modifier extra lightning and thunder damage and push the target up to 4 squares.

The Spirit Khanate

None can say how far back in history the presence of the thri-kreen extends. The powerful primal entity known as the Spirit Khanate tells its thri-kreen followers that they were the first and best race. The Spirit Khanate is composed of many ancestral spirits of thri-kreen lost through violent deaths, wasting sun sickness, and other gruesome fates. They are bound together in thri-kreen racial memory. Despite being composed of the spiritual energy of untold numbers of thri-kreen, the Spirit Khanate views itself to be and behaves as a single entity, in accordance with

BACKGROUND: SPIRIT CLUTCH

Thri-kreen characters, or characters of other races who were raised by thri-kreen (an unusual situation, but not unheard-of), can select the Spirit Clutch background.

Spirit Clutch: As an orphan growing to maturity among the thri-kreen, you had no true clutch; instead, you were adopted and guided by the ancestral spirits of the Spirit Khanate. They taught you to hunt and filled you with tales of lost empires and the superiority of the thri-kreen. Such an upbringing might not intrude too much on the outlook or behavior of a thri-kreen, but you might not be a thri-kreen. Did your childhood alter your perspective on the thri-kreen? Did stories of lost cities in the wasteland imbue you with a longing for adventure?

Associated Skills: Endurance, History

Personal Quests: Single-handedly hunt and slay a creature at least 4 levels higher than you; uncover (or conceal from enemies) evidence of a long-lost thri-kreen empire; lead the thri-kreen to conquest.

the clutch mentality of the thri-kreen. Though its loyalty is ostensibly to the Sand Father, the Spirit Khanate extols xenophobia as a virtue that keeps the thri-kreen strong. It pushes those who will listen to aggressively expand thri-kreen territory and defend it against the cultural influence of other races.

The tribal mindset of the Spirit Khanate appeals most strongly to shamans. Feats such as Spirit Tribe (*Primal Power*) embody this outlook. Many followers of the Spirit Khanate select powers that call upon formidable ancestors for aid. The path of the scarred healer (*Primal Power*) allows shamans to take the place in battle that is demanded by the Khanate. The power below, *four-armed is forewarned*, channels one of the great strengths of the thri-kreen into an ally.

Four-Armed is Forewarned — Shaman Attack 9

You channel the many-armed thri-kreen spirit through your ally, allowing him or her to strike with speed and ferocity.

Daily ✦ Primal, Spirit
Standard Action **Melee** spirit 1
Target: One ally
Effect: The target can make a melee basic attack against up to four enemies adjacent to it as a free action.

Stone Brother

Stone Brother is a sturdy spirit of earth and stone. He now lies imprisoned in the depths of the world, where he is tormented by an unquenchable fire. It is unknown whether he was sequestered by a sorcerer-king or some other, more ancient being.

The solitude and a burning curse have driven Stone Brother insane. Many sentient beings that live too long underground are driven mad. This is the case with the feral hejkin who worship Stone Brother. Myths relate the madness of Stone Brother; his bizarre whispers echo endlessly through caverns deep inside the world. Other stories connect Stone Brother and his burning curse to sites of volcanic activity. Such tales are common around the Smoking Crown.

Those who follow Stone Brother are marked by their ruthless fighting and love of powers that evoke fire and stone. Many of Stone Brother's brutal devotees become stonefire ragers (*Primal Power*). Muls find the battle fervor of Stone Brother appealing, and many disciples of Stone Brother can be found in the gladiatorial pits of Athas. Earth wardens and even shamans and druids are drawn toward veneration of Stone Brother.

His strongest following, however, is among rage-blood barbarians (*Player's Handbook 2*), who emulate the burning fury that consumes Stone Brother's restless spirit with feats such as Explosive Rage Strike (*Primal Power*) and Reckless Rage (*Primal Power*). The barbarian attack given here, *earth grasp rage*, embodies the key virtues of Stone Brother.

Earth Grasp Rage — Barbarian Attack 5

Your rage reaches out to Stone Brother, and arms of molten stone form to grab your foe.

Daily ✦ Fire, Primal, Rage, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. Reflex
Hit: 1[W] damage. The target takes ongoing 5 fire damage and is immobilized (save ends both).
Aftereffect: The target falls prone.
Miss: Half damage, and the target falls prone.
Effect: You enter the rage of earth's grasp. Until the rage ends, your attacks against prone targets deal 5 extra fire damage.

About the Author

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Unearthed Arcana

Strongholds

By Robert J. Schwalb

Illustrations by Michael Phillippi and Eric Deschamps

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The Dungeons & Dragons® *Fantasy Roleplaying Game* provides numerous ways to part heroes from their hard-earned coin. The components that power rituals can drain the heroes' coffers, as can purchasing a magic item that sparkles on an artificer's shelf. Adventurers might invest in galleons, mounts, wagons, and, at higher levels, planar vehicles such as *spelljammers* and *planar dromonds*. One investment absent from the game is the stronghold, a retreat where adventurers can withdraw between expeditions, recover from their injuries, and conduct research before embarking on their next quest.

Most of the treasure and other rewards gathered over the course of adventures have obvious, tangible benefits. The benefit of a stronghold tends to be intangible. Adventurers can't bring a stronghold along during an adventurer or attack an enemy with it. It doesn't affect success or failure in most quests. A fighter doesn't become more lethal by owning a castle.

Instead, a stronghold is a story device. It is used or ignored as the plot demands.

With this fact in mind, an exhaustive treatment of building and maintaining strongholds is largely wasted effort for most players. (Some enjoy that sort of minutia, of course; this article is for everyone else.) When adventurers leave behind the heroic tier, they travel farther away and farther from their roots to deal with bigger and nastier threats. There are fewer opportunities to return to the stronghold when heroes are walking Sigil's streets or exploring dominions in the Astral Sea, but nothing says they can't build or take control of another stronghold in those more far-flung realms.

Strongholds have a rich tradition in the Dungeons & Dragons game and are ripe with story opportunities. This article presents a simplified system for building and maintaining strongholds in your campaigns. The options offered here should help you construct a base quickly and easily and give you a benefit commensurate with your investment.

Stronghold Basics

A stronghold is a base of operations, a headquarters, and a safe retreat for your adventurers. It is the place where heroes go between expeditions and therefore isn't likely to figure prominently in any particular adventure (though it can if the DM creates the right conditions). Furthermore, paragon and epic tier characters spend more time far afield and might find themselves advancing several levels before getting a chance to kick up their feet in front of the hearth at home.

For these reasons, this article lets players or the Dungeon Master build a stronghold using a system that abstracts many of the details while leaving plenty of room for imagination in defining the stronghold's appearance, location, and composition.

One Price for All: A basic stronghold costs 25,000 gp. Thus, a stronghold is equivalent to a level 15 magic item. It is more expensive than a greatship and about the same price as purchasing a nightmare to serve as your steed.

If you purchase a second stronghold, you might use it as a second base of operations or as an expansion of the first stronghold. You can also improve your stronghold by purchasing new stronghold components as described below.

FOR THE DM: BE FAIR!

This one's for Dungeon Masters: If building a stronghold is important to a player, don't take it away without a good reason. Sinking 25,000 gp into a structure is a considerable investment when you consider that the same player could be riding in style on a nightmare or wearing a slick new suit of *+3 holy radiance chainmail*.

Such items can be lost over the course of a campaign. The party's greatship might end up at the bottom of Woolly Bay after tangling with an angry water elemental, and an angel with a grudge might skewer the nightmare, sending Smoky to an early grave. In the same vein, putting the adventurers' stronghold in jeopardy can be a good plot hook and create interesting tension. The trick is not to do it often. And if the outcome results in taking the stronghold away, be a mensch and give the party something of equal value to replace it a bit later on.

One Size Fits All: A stronghold is a castle, but it can also be a cathedral, a monastery, an academy, a wizard's tower, an estate, a cave complex, an island, or anything else you can imagine and justify to the DM.

A stronghold is not a country. It's not a city, a room above an inn, a pocket dimension, or a closet in Grandma Adventure's country house. It's generally not mobile; that would be a ship, a flying citadel, or a colossus machine. (But those are great ideas. DMs should always give due consideration to player requests and remain flexible. If you want both a ship and a stronghold, then you might purchase both separately—a ship and an island fortress, for example—or you could ask the DM to let you combine the costs

and buy a greatship that doubles as a stronghold. It's all about options.) A stronghold is large enough to accommodate an entire adventuring party plus the support staff (if any is needed) to maintain the facility.

A basic stronghold comprises 300 squares of floor space (7,500 square feet). You are encouraged to draw the floor plan of your stronghold. It's a fun and creative way to spend some time, and it might prove useful—if a floor plan exists, the DM probably will find a use for it. Use the squares to construct rooms, passages, and whatever other interior spaces you want. You can build a one-story stronghold, stack floors on top of each other to create multistory buildings or towers, or excavate dungeon levels. It's entirely up to you, as long as you stick to your 300-square limit.

A Secure Site: Every stronghold is basically safe and secure. Outside of extraordinary circumstances, you shouldn't need to worry about being robbed or invaded while tucked in bed at night, or about coming home to find that your castle has been looted, occupied, or whisked away in your absence.

Don't be cavalier about security, though. Make the wrong enemies, and the DM might send the villain and his cronies to call on you the next time you're recuperating between adventures.

Gaining a Stronghold

Your character can gain a stronghold in three ways: you can buy it, take it, or build it.

Purchase

The easiest way to gain a stronghold is to buy it. The difficulty is that the good ones are already owned by someone else, and that person might not be in the market to sell. Tracking down a seller could require a skill challenge involving interaction (Diplomacy, Insight, Intimidate) and information-gathering skills (Streetwise). You need to find a redoubt with a suitable location and architecture. Certain rituals might relocate the stronghold or transform it into something more pleasing to the eye, but resorting to rituals adds to the total investment.

For the DM: Characters can purchase a stronghold only if you provide them with a suitable property. If they make the investment, work with the players to devise a stronghold that best fits the game.

Conquest

You can also pick up a stronghold as a reward. You might claim a wizard's tower after expelling its previous occupants, or set up shop in a crumbling castle once you dispatch the vampire hiding in the cellar. Taking a stronghold by force has some of the same limitations as purchasing one outright (location and architecture) with the added complication of the previous occupant's tastes and nature. One can never completely eliminate the smell from a necromancer's tower, for example. On the other hand, if you find the perfect structure but its evil occupant turns down your reasonable offer to buy, then kicking him out can get you the stronghold you want and improve the neighborhood at the same time.

For the DM: If players seize a stronghold by main force, then count the stronghold as 25,000 gp worth of treasure for the adventure. The stronghold might already be mapped, especially if the characters explored it as a dungeon in the process of capturing it. You are likely to find these structures are a bit larger than a stronghold normally allows. This is OK within reason, because the characters have paid for the overage with blood. If the stronghold is significantly too large, then just deduct more treasure from the reward.

Construction

If buying or seizing a stronghold doesn't fit with your plans, you can build one from scratch. Doing so doesn't cost any more than buying one. It does take time, though. Considering that a community might spend decades building a cathedral or a castle, don't expect to move in right away. Even in a perfect scenario, you need to rely on the availability of local materials and labor. This situation gets worse if you make an artful decision and place the stronghold in a ridiculous spot, such as clinging to the side of a mountain or on a remote and barren island. Depending on what you want, it could take 1d10 + 5 months to build an impressive wooden structure such as the longhouse illustrated in this article, to 1d10 + 5 years to build a stone castle or cathedral from scratch. Extra time can be tacked on for extremely difficult projects.

CONSTRUCTION RITUALS

The following rituals can reduce the time it takes to construct a stronghold by a number of years (or months) equal to the higher of your Intelligence or Wisdom modifier. Multiple uses of the same ritual do not reduce the time any further, though different rituals will. Suitable rituals include Commune with Nature (*Player's Handbook*®), Ironwood (*Player's Handbook 2*), Trailblaze (*Forgotten Realms*® *Player's Guide*), and Earthen Ramparts, Excavation, and Tenser's Lift (all *Dragon* 366).

Luckily, rituals can shave years from your building project. When using a ritual to speed or complete construction, deduct the ritual's component price from the stronghold's price. See the "Construction Rituals" sidebar for discounts on time.

Better still, you might create a stronghold using a powerful ritual such as Bigby's Construction Crew.

New Ritual: Bigby's Construction Crew

Level: 15 **Component Cost:** 5,000 gp
Category: Creation **Market Price:** 20,000 gp
Time: 24 hours **Key Skill:** Arcana (no check)
Duration: Permanent

A veritable army of magical hands appears in the air around you, each armed with tools appropriate to the task to which you set them, from carpentry to masonry. When you perform the ritual, you describe the desired construction in great detail. The hands start working as soon as they appear, assembling the structure from available material. They will quarry stone and cut it to shape, fell trees and saw them into lumber, gather reeds for thatch, and so on, but their range is limited to only a mile or so; they can't erect a stone cathedral in a sandy desert. They can also repair a ruined structure or use the material of a ruined structure to build something new. The hands cannot make attacks or deal damage, and they are impervious to damage.

You can use this ritual to build a stronghold whose constructed space does not exceed 300 squares. That space can be divided and arranged any way you please but must be contiguous.

With the DM's permission, you can use this ritual for other construction purposes such as building a bridge, carving stairs up the side of a mountain, and similar tasks.

Creating the Stronghold

Few adventuring groups have more than one stronghold at a time; thus, the process for creating the stronghold is best when it's a collaborative one. Work with your fellow players and the Dungeon Master to decide the stronghold's features.

Look and Feel

You decide the stronghold's look and feel. It can be a medieval castle, a mystical lodge formed from living trees, an enormous wizard's tower, or a mighty cathedral built to honor your god. The cosmetic elements do not alter the stronghold's base price.

Location

When creating a stronghold, first consider where you intend to place it. For acquired strongholds, you don't have a lot of choice; the stronghold is where you find it. If you're building a stronghold, you can construct it wherever you like. Remote locations make it harder to construct a stronghold if you're relying on local labor. A really remote location such as a mountaintop or deep wilderness doubles the price to 50,000 gp. A fantastical location such as underwater, on another plane, or floating in the clouds can be achieved only by ritual and costs 125,000 gp. Don't feel limited by these guidelines. Work with your DM to create something you're both happy with.

Construction Squares

You have 300 construction squares with which to build your stronghold. Use these squares to create rooms and corridors. You need concern yourself with floor space only; room heights don't count toward the total unless they become unreasonable. What's reasonable is up to the DM to determine. In the worlds of Dungeons & Dragons fantasy, 25-foot ceilings are relatively common.

Rooms: A "room" might be a bedroom or a dining hall, but it can also be a barbican (made by creating two towers), a courtyard, or a dock. A room can be any size you like. You could, for example, create one large room 15 squares wide by 20 squares long or, for the same amount of floor space, you could have four 5-by-5 rooms and two 8-by-10 rooms linked by 100 feet of 10-foot-wide corridor.

Corridors: Corridors connect the rooms you create. Be sure to reserve construction squares to create these passages. A corridor must be at least 1 square wide.

Walls: Walls frame every room you create. An interior wall is wooden, is 6 inches thick, and includes as many wooden doors as you wish. An exterior wall usually is masonry (unless that is not a realistic option for the location or isn't what you want), 1 foot thick, and can have as many wooden doors and windows as you like.

Ceilings and Floors: Floors and ceilings throughout are made from the same materials as the walls. Ceilings are 10 feet high unless specified otherwise. You can create levels above the ground floor by allocating construction squares for higher floors. If your stronghold has multiple levels, they're connected by a stone or wooden staircase.

MAPPING THE STRONGHOLD

Whether you create a floor plan for your stronghold is up to you. Since you're not likely to undertake adventures here, you can roughly sketch out the rooms and their relative locations, connecting them with hallways and stairs as needed. Or, if you have a hankering to create a detailed map, go for it. The more detail you supply, the more alive the stronghold becomes.

Every stronghold needs a few minimum elements. You should have at least one bedroom plus a number of guest rooms. You can also have a common room or barracks. There should also be a kitchen and a workshop or armory. You can add as many extra rooms as you like, within the limits of your construction squares.

Stocking the Rooms

You decide the purpose of any room you create. You can stock that room with basic furniture and decorations appropriate for the room's function; such furnishings are included in the stronghold's cost. A bedroom has a bed, dresser, table, and so on, and a dining hall has a table and chairs. You can go into as much or as little detail as you like.

Special Rooms

You can designate rooms to serve special functions. You might make a dungeon, a throne room, or a magical laboratory. Such rooms require a minimum size and also incur greater expense. In exchange, you gain an additional benefit for having that room. Some common special rooms are described below.

Unless otherwise specified, each of these must be their own room in the stronghold; special functions aren't combined under normal circumstances.

Auditorium — Level 2 Common

Acoustics in this room are ideal for addressing a large audience.

Stronghold Component 520 gp
Requirement: This room must contain 24 or more squares.
Property: You gain a +1 item bonus to Bluff and Diplomacy checks made in this room.

Armory — Level 7 Common

This room holds an assortment of weapons and armor.

Stronghold Component 2,600 gp
Requirement: This room must contain 24 or more squares.
Property: This room holds up to fifty mundane weapons and suits of armor, of which you can't have more than five of one type. You can substitute one weapon for thirty arrows, twenty bolts, or six shuriken.

Chapel — Level 5+ Common

Holy ground helps focus your thoughts toward religious matters.

Lvl 5 1,000 gp Lvl 25 625,000 gp
Lvl 15 25,000 gp
Stronghold Component
Requirement: This room must contain 9 or more squares.
Property: You gain a +1 item bonus to Religion checks made in this room.
Level 15: +2 item bonus.
Level 25: +3 item bonus.

Magical Laboratory — Level 5+ Common

A laboratory equipped with all the equipment you need to conduct magical research.

Lvl 5 1,000 gp Lvl 25 625,000 gp
Lvl 15 25,000 gp
Stronghold Component
Requirement: This room must contain 4 or more squares.
Property: You gain a +1 item bonus to Arcana checks made in this room.
Level 15: +2 item bonus.
Level 25: +3 item bonus.

Library — Level 8+ Common

Books and scrolls stacked on shelves and tables are instrumental for your research.

Lvl 8 3,400 gp Lvl 28 2,125,000 gp
Lvl 18 85,000 gp
Stronghold Component
Requirement: This room must contain 16 or more squares.
Property: Choose one of the following skills: Arcana, Dungeoneering, History, Nature, or Religion. You gain a +1 item bonus to knowledge checks and monster knowledge checks related to that skill when the check is made in this room.
Level 18: +2 item bonus.
Level 28: +3 item bonus.
Special: You can purchase this component several times for the same room. Choose a different skill each time the component is purchased.

Prison — Level 4+ Common

Manacles and heavy iron bars ensure that your prisoners stay where you put them.

Lvl 4 840 gp Lvl 24 525,000 gp
Lvl 14 21,000 gp
Stronghold Component
Requirement: This room must contain 16 or more squares.
Property: Creatures placed inside this room cannot exit this room by nonmagical means until you release them or until they succeed on a DC 21 Acrobatics or Athletics check.
Level 14: DC 29.
Level 24: DC 37.

Throne Room — Level 6 Common

This chamber holds an impressive seat and trophies won from your successful expeditions.

Stronghold Component 1,800 gp
Requirement: This room must contain 16 or more squares.
Property: You gain a +1 item bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, Insight, and Intimidate checks made in this room.

Torture Chamber — Level 3+ Common

Sinister implements and devices reveal this room's terrible purpose.

Lvl 3 680 gp Lvl 23 425,000 gp
Lvl 13 17,000 gp
Stronghold Component
Requirement: This room must contain 16 or more squares.
Property: You gain a +1 item bonus to Intimidate checks made in this room.
Level 13: +2 item bonus.
Level 23: +3 item bonus.

Defenses

You can add defenses to your stronghold by investing additional gold into its construction.

Arrow Slits — Level 4 Common

Narrow windows allow archers to fire from protected positions.

Stronghold Component 840 gp
Property: Windows in your structure are arrow slits. Creatures fighting from an arrow slit have at least superior cover against attacks made by enemies outside the stronghold.

Defensive Walls — Level 10 Common

You surround your stronghold with a thick, outer wall.

Stronghold Component 5,000 gp
Property: Defensive walls are stone, 10 feet high, and 10 feet thick. A creature must succeed on an Athletics check against a moderate DC of the creature's level to climb the wall. The wall can have as many gates as you like. Creatures on top of the wall have at least partial cover against attacks made by creatures on the ground.
Special: You can purchase this component multiple times. Each time you purchase a defensive wall, you can add an extra wall or fortify an existing wall. When you fortify an existing wall, the wall's height and width increase by 5 feet.

Guards — Level 1+ Common

You employ a squad of guards and sentries to keep your stronghold safe while you're away.

Stronghold Component Special
Property: You employ a troop of guards to protect your stronghold. When you purchase this stronghold component, you choose the level for your guards. The price is equal to a magic item of that level. The guards make your stronghold immune to attacks from any creature of their level or lower.

Iron Doors — Level 3 Common

Replacing interior doors with iron doors provides an additional level of protection.

Stronghold Component 680 gp
Property: Doors in the stronghold are made of iron.

Moat — Level 8

A wide trench filled with water and stakes greatly impedes attackers.

Stronghold Component 3,400 gp
Property: A moat surrounds your stronghold. It is 15 feet deep and 30 feet wide. The moat includes a drawbridge.

Superior Locks — Level 3 Common

These masterwork locks foil intruders from reaching your protected rooms.

Stronghold Component 680 gp
Property: Doors in the stronghold are equipped with superior locks. To unlock a locked door without a key requires a Thievery check against a hard DC of the level of the creature picking the lock.

WARDED STRONGHOLDS

Ritual casters can attune themselves to places where they are comfortable. When they perform rituals in these locations, their wards cover a larger area. When you use a warding ritual such as Guards and Wards, Forbiddance, or Arcane Lock in a stronghold owned by you or an ally, the ritual's effect applies to the entire stronghold.

Staff

Maintaining a stronghold takes a lot of work. If you kept the stronghold in good repair yourself, you wouldn't have time for much else. When you gain a stronghold, you also gain sufficient staff to keep the place in good shape. Your staff includes necessary servants, cooks, butlers, artisans, farmers, and so on. "Necessary" is a key word; you don't automatically get more staff than you really need.

Your staff keeps the stronghold in good repair, clean, and well provisioned. The initial investment into the stronghold covers expenses for feeding, clothing, and housing your employees. Staff members are noncombatants and do not accompany you on your adventures.

Traps

Adding traps can provide even greater protection against unwanted intruders. You can use any existing trap or work with your DM to construct one that best fits your idea. A trap has a price equal to a magic item of the same level. For an elite trap, double the price. For a solo trap, quintuple the price.

Magical Upgrades

Wondrous lair items introduced in *Adventurer's Vault*™ 2 are handy upgrades for improving your stronghold's defenses and benefits. These items are inexpensive and extremely useful. A *teleportation disk* lets you teleport to any location in your stronghold, while a *watchful eye* alerts you when someone enters its line of sight. You might install a *holy shrine* in your temple to increase your prayer flexibility or bring in a *diplomat's table* to gain an edge in every negotiation.

TELEPORTATION CIRCLES

One of the first investments you should make in your stronghold is inscribing a permanent teleportation circle. A stronghold the adventurers find or acquire might already have a teleportation circle. If so, this is both good and bad. It's good because you won't be out 10,000 gp to perform the ritual. It's bad because someone out there probably knows the sigil sequence and can drop in for a visit whenever they like.

To inscribe a teleportation circle, you need access to the Create Teleportation Circle ritual (*Manual of the Planes*™). You need to perform the ritual and then sustain it for a year and a day to make it permanent. If you don't have the time or means to sustain it this long, you can probably find someone to do it for you in exchange for a moderate fee or for free room and board in your secure stronghold.

Mobile Strongholds

The biggest challenge with any stronghold is using it when you're away for long periods. Installing a permanent teleportation circle lets you come and go as you please, but you still must burn through components and then figure out a way to return to the action. The following rituals help you get the most out of your stronghold by bringing it with you.

Call Stronghold

Level: 20
Category: Creation
Time: 1 hour
Duration: Permanent
Component Cost: 5,000 gp
Market Price: 25,000 gp
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)

You warp reality to draw a specially prepared stronghold from one location to another. You must prepare a clear area of the stronghold's size or larger. If not, the ritual fails and the components are wasted. This ritual is not limited by planar boundaries, thus allowing you to transfer the stronghold from the natural world to the Feywild or another plane.

RAISE LAND VS. FLYING FORTRESS

Flying Fortress is similar to the Raise Land ritual from *Forgotten Realms® Player's Guide*. Admittedly, they achieve similar effects. Raise Land is awesome for folks wanting to tear two-square-mile chunks of land and send them upward like balloons at a festival, but until you hit 30th level, it leaves your stronghold as landlocked as a rowboat in a desert. Flying Fortress is an abbreviated and mobile version of the higher-level ritual to let you have fun with your awesome investment for a few levels before you make your exit.

Flying Fortress

Level: 23
Component Cost: 13,000 gp
Category: Travel
Market Price: 65,000 gp
Time: 1 hour
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)
Duration: Permanent

Your stronghold and a quantity of earth beneath it rise 100 feet into the air and remain there. The fortress gains a fly speed of 6 (hover). When you are in the stronghold, you can spend a move action to let the fortress fly up to its speed in any direction you choose. If the flying fortress impacts any object, it comes to a stop.

Final Considerations

Strongholds are an interesting option for characters who have gold to burn, but it's not an option with equal appeal for every player. Creating a stronghold takes time and planning, even using a simplified system such as this one. It also brings added responsibility. Having a big castle means that locals look to you for protection, whether or not you're a legitimate lord. When you gain levels, your interest in the natural world undoubtedly wanes as your gaze is drawn to new foes in distant lands and planes.

With that in mind, is building a stronghold a worthwhile enterprise?

Absolutely! Strongholds give you control over a small part of the world. They let you add something to the world and shape how it looks. A large, permanent structure creates new opportunities for adventure and roleplaying through the new challenges of protecting the site and those who live in its environs. Your characters can push back the savage darkness and expand the light of civilization in a tangible, long-lasting way. They become grounded in the campaign setting in a way unlike any other, so that your adventurer is not fighting just for a brief respite from evil but to establish a permanent haven.

Finally, when characters outgrow a stronghold and decide to move on, it's up to them to pass that mantle of leadership to a capable nonplayer character who has grown in their presence and learned from their example, and who will carry on with the noble work they set in motion.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed nearly two hundred roleplaying game titles for Dungeons & Dragons, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire Roleplaying*, *Star Wars*, and the d20 system. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *D&D Gamma World: Famine in Far-Go*, *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*, and in *Monster Manual* 3. Also, he's a regular contributor to both *Dragon* and *Dungeon*® magazines. For more information about the author, be sure to check out his website at www.robertjschwalb.com.

Rules of Engagement

BY SHELLY MAZZANOBLE
illustration by William O'Conner

A few interesting things happened to me over the holidays.

- I ate so many sugar cookies that I gave my brother a blood blister when the button on my jeans popped off and hit him.
- My mom schooled me on the fine art of shooting Sambuca.
- I got engaged.

I know! Can you believe it? My mom is 65! And oh yeah, the engagement is pretty unreal, too.

My Betrothed is a Dungeons & Dragons® player. Big time. Has been playing for decades. Because of that, news of our engagement was met with comments such as "Oh no, he failed his Perception check!" and "I didn't know you knew *charm person*." Har, har. I don't need a stupid spell to get hitched. I have a bitchin' dowry.

Even our friend who is going to conduct the ceremony is a D&D® player and wanted to know if he could weave a little D&D into the vows.

"Like what?" I asked. "*I will be there when you level and promise to make you a stronger build?*"

"Ohhh, that's good," Marty said, writing it down. "But I was thinking more along the lines of respecting thy weekly game."

Oh, believe me. I know better than to mess with his Thursday game. Besides, that's when *Real Housewives* is on.

If it were up to my Betrothed, I would walk down the aisle to the *Imperial March* and our first dance would be to the Chicago Bears fight song. (We might find a way to work that in. Just not sure how we'd break it to my dad, since I come from New York Giants stock.)

I'm not certain how D&D will factor into the Big Day, but I'm pretty sure it will make an appearance. *It*, mind you, not Tabitha or Astrid. To answer the second most asked question: No, we will not be dressing up as our characters. Can't guarantee the same for our guests.

Although D&D isn't the thing that keeps us together, it is the thing that brought us together. We met while working here at Wizards of the Coast and spent five years playing in the same D&D game—as friends. And then, as they say, the rest is history.

"There was something magical about the way you constantly barraged New DM with questions about Tabitha's nap schedule, or how many times in one encounter she can use her shield," he told me. "I thought, *Wow. I can listen to someone ask,* 'Wait. Where are we again?' *for the rest of my life*."

Indeed. I, on the other hand, couldn't stand his characters. They're always splitting the party and insisting on knocking over a bookcase rather than just going around it.

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"What'd you do that for?" I asked. "You've got like thirty feet on either side!"

"Because if there was a monster behind it, I'd hit him," he reasoned. "It's called being efficient."

Great. If we have kids, I hope they don't inherit his efficiency.

No doubt playing D&D together is a bonding experience for couples. How many couples do you know who met while playing D&D? It makes sense. I mean, if you're going to spend hours doing a nonmandatory activity, it really helps if your partner is doing it too. The Betrothed and I both love sleeping, eating food covered with melted cheese, and watching TV. Have you any idea how much more productive sleeping eighteen hours a day feels when someone on the other couch is doing that too?

Here's a weird thing that's happening now. My engagement has suddenly made me an expert on esoteric subjects such as nonperishable centerpieces, Washington State liquor laws, the difference between an A-line skirt and a *modified* A-line. Oh, and relationships.

"He's addicted to his phone!" my cousin lamented about her husband of three years. "I feel like we're not communicating unless I send him a text or something. What should I do?"

"I don't know. Make sure you have unlimited texting on your plan?" I answered. I had been engaged for only 14 hours at that point. What did I know? But I went on to explain that just because two people live in the same house doesn't mean quality time can be taken for granted. "Pass the salt" and "Is that a wet towel on the new duvet cover?" aren't exactly sweet nothings. Perhaps they needed to revisit their past when they were dating and were forced to make time for each other.

"Good advice," she told me over email about a week later. "We've got official *date nights* on the calendar. I feel better already."

Weird. Is it possible that taking my relationship to the next level has also taken *me* to the next level? A level where I'm trained in Insight?

I know some of you have . . . shall we say . . . challenges when it comes to getting your significant other to take a seat at the gaming table. I've overheard things in the office kitchen when I'm reheating my green beans. I've seen the arm-tugging and pleading in the demo space at Gen Con. I've read your emails and forwarded them on to someone much wiser than I. But not anymore. It appears that wearing a ring on the fourth digit of your left hand isn't just a direct line to your heart, it's an answer line to matters of the heart.

Allow me to offer some tips and mostly tricks for getting your +1 into the party.

Question: My wife won't let me play D&D. What should I do?

Answer: Won't *let* you? Did you say wife or mother? I'm going to assume that if it's wife, you're of marrying age, which means you're an adult and should be able to make your own decisions about how to spend your free time. But that's the unmarried me talking. I've heard that, come September, I'm supposed to be all about compromise. Yadda, yadda.

HOWEVER . . .

You failed to say *why* she won't let you play. Are you playing all the time? Does she think D&D involves real dungeons and real dragons? Does playing D&D cause you to do weird things like knock over bookcases when you could have just gone around them? If you answered yes to any of these, then her case is strong. Maybe you could take up pottery or scrapbooking.

If your wife has valid concerns about your D&D play, then be open-minded. But also let her know how important playing is to you. Compare your D&D game to a weekly poker game or a *Real Housewives* viewing party (don't knock it until you've been to one). And remind her that while you're off doing your thing, she can use that time to do something she loves to do. Especially if it's your treat.

Question: Success! My girlfriend has finally agreed to give D&D a try. But now I'm scared that I have only one shot to make a good impression. How can I make sure she has a good time?

Answer: Did you ever hear the statistic that a woman knows within the first 15 minutes of a first date whether there will be a second date? I think that's B.S. It doesn't take *that* long. Regardless, the same can be true about D&D. Oh, she'll know right away if her character has a chance in the Nine Hells of making it to 2nd level.

I DMed a couple of times for newbie girls. I'm not the most perceptive person in the room (Hi there, screen door. How did you get there?), but even I can tell from the glassy-eyed, watch-checking, head-lolling at the table who will be back for a second encounter before I even finish the first paragraph of read-aloud text.

My first suggestion is to try to get at least one other newbie to play with you. D&D can be daunting, and an established player can sometimes forget how much information you're smacked with at first. She'll definitely feel more comfortable as a beginner if she

knows that the guy across from her also can't tell the difference between a d8 and a d10.

Second, give her something to relate to. You can take liberties in D&D. It took me years to figure that out. Customize an encounter to her liking. If she loved *Lost*, you can set the action on a mysterious island after a bizarre caravan disaster. If she still harbors ill will toward her seventh-grade math teacher (curse you, Mr. Bertolini, and your inverse operations!), then feel free to use him as your villain. Having a personalized encounter will help her become invested from the first die roll.

Speaking of becoming invested, encourage her to create a character. We're women. We get attached to things. In fact, I already love the next thirty characters I'll make someday.

In college, I had a huge crush on a long-haired hippie dude. It lasted until the jackass picked up my teddy bear and chucked him against the wall. For no reason! Who does that? (And, yes, that *is* weirder than having a teddy bear when you're in college.) Any amorous feelings I harbored for that guy were dashed.

I'm telling you this for a reason. For the love of all things holy, DO NOT KILL HER CHARACTER! Even if she makes a grave error in judgment. Even if a beholder crits her. Even if she throws her character into the mouth of a red dragon. LIE. Nothing snuffs the romance out of a room quicker than sweeping up the bits of your newly beloved half-elf from the playmat. Except maybe throwing an innocent teddy bear against a cement wall.

Question: My wife thinks D&D is geeky. What can I do to change her mind?

Answer: Ha! Good luck with that one.

Seriously, here's the deal. Don't focus so much on making her think D&D *isn't* geeky. Instead, help her understand that geeky isn't a bad thing. Lots of things are geeky, and lots of geeks are embracing their geeky passions.

One of my best friends is married to a full-on gamer geek. She's, well . . . not one . . . despite his best efforts to woo her. One weekend, a bunch of us made plans to rent a beach house, and the guys made mention of how the setting was ripe for gaming. My friend didn't just roll her eyes and sigh. She actually said the word "sigh" to illustrate how utterly bored the idea made her.

What doesn't bore her? Making cat hats. *The Tudors*. Speed-walking. *Speed-walking*! The weird thing is that she doesn't think any of those things are geeky. Has she not seen speed-walkers walking?

If you really care what your girlfriend thinks about your hobby, then have her turn to page 11 in *Confessions of a Part-Time Sorceress* and read about all the good geek company you're keeping. What? Don't have a copy of *Confessions of a Part-Time Sorceress?* Well, start there!

If all that fails, tell her you're going to give up D&D for cat-hat making. That ought to put things in perspective.

Question: I've been playing D&D with my boyfriend and his friends for about six months (at his urging), but when he's the DM, I feel like he's gunning for me. Is he using D&D to vent some deep-seated resentment?

Answer: I'm inclined to say "I hope not," but after thinking about it, I can't help but wonder, *Is that a bad thing?*

Yes, yes, of course it is! You're adults! If some issues are bubbling below the surface, you should be able to talk about them. If you can't, then that's a sign that something is rotten in the state of Hallmark.

But I don't think that's what's going on here because of two things you mention: *his urging* and *his friends*. He clearly wanted to include you in his D&D game, and that says a lot. I love spending six hours on a Sunday at Target, wandering the aisles and perusing the end caps, but I would never invite the Betrothed to join me. It's a solo activity.

The fact that you joined his group, perhaps a group he's been playing with for a while, makes me think he might be trying to prove to everyone else that he's not playing favorites. What's that saying? *You always crit the one you love?* If you enjoy playing, maybe you can start up a second group. And you can try DMing. And being mean to *him*. I mean, his *character*.

Question: I don't like playing with girls. How can I discourage them from playing in my games?

Answer: To each their own, I guess. My advice to you is—be yourself. That ought to do the trick.

See that? Expert advice! And I don't even work in R&D. Now if I could get a little advice from you, that would be fabulous. What do you think for a groom's cake: a beholder, a giant d20, or a red dragon torching a tiny ceramic couple who have a ball and chain strapped around their ankles?

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble understands the true significance of "tying the knot." Yet she can't quite contain her excitement over the prospect of getting silverware that doesn't rust in the dishwasher and a coffee maker that doesn't sound like a hippo eating a vacuum every morning when it brews.

Heroes of the Fallen Lands

Class Acts: Knight

Sword Guard of Astrazalian

By Robert J. Schwalb
Illustration by Mathias Kollros

"Who are you to question my honor? What could you know about discipline, duty, or obligation? When my city returns to the blasted land of its founding, I return with it. I face the war once again, while you and the other mortal vermin flee. I have held these white towers against dragons. I have witnessed fomorian horrors crawling across the landscape beneath these very walls. I have fought along these canals to safeguard the majestic swans gifted to my people by Corellon. I might not stand fast and trade blows with enemies as you do, but I do fight and I do win."

The City of Starlight straddles two worlds. For half the year, this brilliant, shining community rising from the forested hills clings to an emerald isle. The promise of riches and lore lures mortals from miles around to trade, study, and mingle with the strange people living there and to experience the healing offered by the priests roaming the halls inside their graceful towers. Yet when winter's grasp tightens and the first frost settles across the land, the city fades. The towers and walls grow thin, and the city returns once more to the Feywild in a swirl of snow and mist. There, it crowns the blasted land between those ruled by the Court of Stars and those subject to the fomorian tyrants. When those towers resolve against the darkened sky, an ancient conflict resumes. Brave champions stand ready to throw back the twisted hordes stumbling out from the long night. Wizards hurl death against witches and warlocks capering in the gloom. Griffons lift to the sky to rain terror on the enemies who have assailed Astrazalian's borders for centuries beyond counting.

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War grips the legendary city, and the people there must give their all to its defense lest it fall to slaughter and ruin.

The Sword Guard is the heart of Astrazalian's armed might. These knights are the reason the city has never fallen. They are why time and again the wicked armies fall back in tatters. Like knights in the natural world, these warriors display a well-honed fighting style, demonstrating unequaled skill with each strike and parry. They lock foes into relentless melee to buy space for allies who winnow the enemy with arrows and spells. It has fought for centuries, yet the Sword Guard stands undaunted and unbroken.

The key to the Sword Guard's success is its perfect marriage of magical talent with deadly fighting techniques. In battle, each member of the Sword Guard can appear in the enemies' midst. There, with terrifying slashes all around, each becomes the eye of a storm. As their enemies converge, the Guard slips away, leaving behind only dead and dying foes.

The Sword Guard veils its techniques from outsiders lest its members face the same maneuvers that give them their advantage. Of course, others have witnessed members of the Sword Guard in action and roughly copied their movements. The techniques—or something like them—have spread in this way to other eladrin enclaves. In rare cases, a member of the Sword Guard might venture into the world to learn other arts of war and, while there, teach the methods of the Sword Guard to someone who has equally valuable techniques to offer in trade. Thus, although the Sword Guard keeps its highest forms a secret, its methods have slowly spread across the Feywild and beyond.

Eladrin Knighthood

Knights are more than common warriors—they are living symbols who embody courage and skill, and they are the best defense the land has against encroaching darkness. Those who walk the knight's road wage a continual battle against evil as they dispense swift justice and place their own lives in peril to protect the innocent. Some swear service to an honorable lord, devoting swords and hammers to protecting the noble's lands and subjects. Others serve no master but their own ideals; they seek their destiny by carrying war to whoever opposes those ideals.

Any race can don the knight's mantle, and the eladrin are no exception. It might seem strange to an outsider that eladrin hold swordplay in high regard, given their magical natures and strong connections to Corellon, the god of magic, beauty, and the arts. Corellon revealed magic's power and splendor to them at the dawn of the world, and the eladrin honor this gift by elevating its study to astounding heights. Despite that age-old tradition, martial practices have equal allure to eladrin.

One need only consider Corellon in his role as protector to see why. Corellon battled Gruumsh and put out the orc-god's eye. He marshaled the eladrin against the dark elves and their treacherous goddess. Under Corellon's leadership, the eladrin defeated their kin and drove them to the deep places beneath the world. Corellon is often depicted as a peerless archer and swordsman in both image and story. Thus the eladrin have come to regard physical prowess expressed through the fighting arts as one of the highest forms of achievement.

For further evidence of the eladrin's martial inclinations, look to the war wizards of the Spiral Tower. These magicians combine spellcraft with swordplay in perfect harmony. Likewise, eladrin swordmages are among the most feared of their kind. So it should come as no surprise that eladrin not only become warriors, they also excel as warriors.

Some eladrin knights cleave to pure martial styles, but the best embrace their arcane nature and blend it with the martial arts. The greatest examples are the members of the Sword Guard, and the methods they use are the stuff of legend. Blinking about the battlefield, they strike from every angle quicker than their enemies can react until the war wizards have destroyed the foe with devastating spells. Although the Sword Guard exemplifies this technique, any eladrin knight can learn to do the same, regardless of whether he or she fights for Astrazalian.

Eladrin warriors are united by their obligation to elvenkind. Eladrin knights champion the ideals of honor and virtue, and all are sworn to protect the cultural riches they inherit. They defend their people, traditions, art, and achievements against all foes. Eladrin knights fight fomorians, werebeasts, goblins, orcs, and, of course, drow. Though many knights bind themselves to a city-state, some venture into the wilderness, plumb the Underdark's depths, explore ruins for lost elven treasures, or continue the perpetual war against their people's enemies in their own ways.

Creating an Eladrin Knight

When creating an eladrin knight, it might be useful to keep the following tips in mind.

Ability Scores: Since eladrin do not gain a bonus to Strength or Constitution, it might be best to choose the specialist array. Place your 18 in Strength and your 14 in Constitution.

Knights do not gain class-based attack powers and instead rely on melee basic attacks. Instead of

making Strength your highest ability score, you can take the Melee Training feat at 1st level to swap out your attack ability from Strength to, say, Intelligence. If you do, your attacks deal less damage than they would if Strength is your highest ability. If you plan to take Melee Training, think about the dual specialist array instead. This spread gives you two 16s. Place one in your attack ability, likely Intelligence, and the other in Constitution. A high Constitution boosts your durability, Fortitude defense, and a few class features.

Equipment: Eladrin knights often wear the heaviest armor they can afford, strap heavy shields to their arms, and wield longswords in combat. Eladrin favor longswords because Corellon used one in his battle against Gruumsh. Knights who take the Melee Training feat to use Intelligence for their basic attacks might find plate armor too cumbersome. Hide armor is an excellent alternative. With Intelligence 18, it gives you protection equivalent to scale mail.

Class Features and Powers

The following class features supplement those available to knights.

Level 1: Feywild Guardian

Eladrin possess basic magical talent. Eladrin knights who exploit this ability can stay one step ahead of their enemies. This power lets you vanish from one position and appear elsewhere so that you can strike an enemy more effectively.

Benefit: You can choose the *Feywild guardian* power in place of *battle guardian*.

Feywild Guardian — Fighter Attack

You teleport from one place to the next to punish an enemy that ignores you.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Teleportation
Opportunity Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must be eladrin.
Trigger: An enemy subject to your *defender aura* either shifts or makes an attack that does not include among its targets either you or an ally who has an active *defender aura*.
Effect: You teleport up to 2 squares to an unoccupied square adjacent to the triggering enemy and then make a melee basic attack against that enemy.

Level 1: Fighter Stance

The fighter stances knights master demonstrate their superior combat training and their excellence in arms. The following power expands the options available to fighters who gain fighter stances at 1st level.

Glimmering Blade

During the War of the Pelt, eladrin knights defeated their lycanthrope enemies with frustrating hit-and-run tactics. *Glimmering blade* lets you use these same tactics to keep your enemies guessing where you will strike next.

Glimmering Blade — Fighter Utility

After a successful strike, you teleport away to appear where your enemy least expects.

At-Will ✦ Martial, Stance, Teleportation
Minor Action **Personal**
Prerequisite: You must be eladrin, and you must have the *fey step* power.
Effect: You assume the *glimmering blade* stance. Until the stance ends, each time you hit an enemy with a melee basic attack using a weapon, you can teleport up to 2 squares to an unoccupied square adjacent to that enemy.

Level 2: Utility Power

The best eladrin knights understand that arcane magic and martial exploits can complement each other. The following power demonstrates how these characters might combine these traditions.

Eldritch Tactics

Fey step is a crucial technique for escaping and ambushing enemies. You have practiced your power enough to cover distances in unexpected ways. With this power, you can take an endangered ally's place.

Eldritch Tactics — Fighter Utility 2

Using your talent for teleportation, you take an ally's place.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Martial, Teleportation
Move Action **Close** burst 3
Prerequisite: You must be eladrin.
Target: You and one ally in the burst
Effect: Each target teleports, swapping positions.

Level 6: Utility Power

Many knights sneer at their eladrin counterparts, declaring that they use unfair tactics in battle. Eladrin knights pay no heed to the critics since victory is often all that matters.

Bewitching Glare

The magical energy coursing through eladrin is a useful tool for defeating foes in combat. *Bewitching glare* allows you to direct magical energy against a foe that has designs on one of your allies.

Bewitching Glare Fighter Utility 6

You catch the enemy's eye just as the foe makes an attack. What it sees in your gaze rattles it enough to interfere with its strike.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Charm, Martial
Immediate Interrupt **Close** burst 3
Prerequisite: You must be eladrin.
Trigger: One enemy in the burst makes an attack roll against an ally you can see.
Target: The triggering enemy
Effect: The enemy takes a –2 penalty to the triggering attack roll. If the attack misses, you can pull the target 1 square. You cannot pull the target into hindering terrain.

Level 10: Utility Power

The fusion of arcane and martial traditions reaches its pinnacle at the end of the heroic tier.

Arcane Instincts

You have studied enough arcane lore to learn how wizards and their ilk construct spells. You can apply this knowledge to your defenses by constructing a shield to block an enemy's attack and mitigate its effect.

Arcane Instincts Fighter Utility 10

You anticipate an enemy's attack and weave a shield to mitigate its worst effect.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Martial
Immediate Interrupt **Close** burst 1
Prerequisite: You must be eladrin.
Trigger: You take acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage.
Target: You and each ally in the burst
Effect: The target gains resist 10 to the triggering damage type until the end of your next turn.

Paragon Path: Eldritch Knight

By the time you reach 11th level, your training in magic merges with your martial expertise. You can now shape arcane energy into useful attacks. Where other knights might choose the path of the stalwart knight, you find another road that leads you to perfecting your unusual style and defeating your enemies' expectations. You might join the Sword Guard at the City of Starlight to hone your techniques, or you might go your own way, learning your techniques through trial and error. Regardless of how you come to these abilities, the result is a deadly fusion of magic and steel, until you become an eldritch knight who can withstand any foe.

Prerequisite: Only a knight who has training in Arcana can take this paragon path.

Level 11: Eldritch Abduction

Eldritch knight paragon path feature
When you make a hasty retreat, you can bring along another creature. Sometimes you might do so to draw an ally out of danger. Other times, you might use it to set up an offensive.

Benefit: Whenever you teleport while your *defender aura* is active, you can teleport one willing creature in the aura to an unoccupied square adjacent to you at the end of your movement. You cannot teleport the creature into hindering terrain.

Level 11: Far Step Extension

Eldritch knight paragon path feature
You seize magical energy and coax greater power from it to close the gap to a distant foe.

Benefit: When you spend an action point to take an extra action, you can teleport up to a number of squares equal to your Intelligence modifier as a free action before or after taking the extra action.

Level 11: Diversified Study

Eldritch knight paragon path feature

The epiphany resulting from your study in the arcane arts puts true magic into your hands. In effect, you can shape arcane magic into spells.

Benefit: You gain one 7th-level or lower wizard encounter attack power. You can use a melee weapon you wield as the implement for this attack. Add the weapon's enhancement bonus (if any) to your attack rolls and damage rolls. You do not, however, add your proficiency bonus to the attack roll.

Level 12: Eldritch Leap

Eldritch knight paragon path feature

Your extensive study in the arcane arts reveals the existence of hidden pathways through space. You can leap from one location to another in the blink of an eye.

Eldritch Leap — **Eldritch Knight Utility 12**

You pick out a foe and close the distance between you in an instant.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Martial, Teleportation
Move Action — **Personal**

Effect: You teleport up to a number of squares equal to your Intelligence modifier to an unoccupied square that is adjacent to an enemy you can see.

Level 16: Eldritch Blade

Eldritch knight paragon path feature

You release magic across the length of your weapon to meet your enemy with full and lethal force.

Benefit: Whenever you hit with a melee weapon attack made while using an opportunity action, the damage ignores insubstantial and any resistances the target might have.

Level 20: Eldritch Isolation

Eldritch knight paragon path feature

You bring to bear the full technique of your fighting style when you perform your signature strike.

Benefit: When you use *power strike*, you and your target both teleport up to 5 squares to squares of your choosing that are adjacent to each other. You cannot end the teleport for you or the target in hindering terrain.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer whose work is in numerous roleplaying supplements and accessories. His most recent work can be found in the *Dark Sun® Campaign Setting*, *Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, *Monster Manual® 3*, and *Player's Handbook® 3*. Robert lives in Tennessee. For a window into Robert's head be sure to check out http://www.robertjschwalb.com.

Sword Guard of Astrazalian

By Robert J. Schwalb and Stephen Schubert

This month we give you an expansion to the knight class from *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™. The "Sword Guard of Astrazalian" article puts a twist on an existing class, so we thought we'd share some insight into its design and development process.

The Concept

Robert: Before I start work on an article, I consider three things. First, I come up with a story concept. Designing game mechanics to serve the story is far more rewarding and interesting than designing to fill empty boxes. Second, I look for design space. What mechanical elements would the story best serve? Coming up with a pile of new powers for the overindulged fighter doesn't do anyone any favors when scads are out there already. Third, I consider the article's size. If I have 2,000 words to play with, it doesn't make sense to think about designing a new build.

As is often the case, no matter how much I plan in the beginning, something shifts design in a different direction. This article was no exception. The core idea came from an issue of *Dragon* magazine from 1986. Chris Booth's "The Elven Cavalier" sparked my imagination the first time I read it, and it's stuck with me ever since. I pitched an elf cavalier to Steve Winter a few months back, wherein we'd create a variant cavalier tailored specifically for elves (and eladrin, and, OK fine, drow, too). He dug the idea. Mike Mearls dug the idea. And I was off.

At that time, the cavalier was still in development, being pulled, stretched, twisted, and transformed into its present state. As the revisions came in, I realized that the article concept wasn't going to work in the space I had, meaning that I needed to rethink how the mechanics would work. After some teeth-gnashing and hand-wringing, I shelved the idea (though I fully intend to go back and build a bow-using cavalier, darn it), and turned to the knight instead.

The Execution

Robert: Having set aside (or thrown away, depending on my mood) my work on the elf cavalier, I sketched out my story concepts for the eladrin knight. An eladrin's schtick is teleportation, so I rooted around in *Manual of the Planes* for something to spark an idea and I came upon Astrazalian. I thought the idea of a city that drifted seasonally between the planes was pretty sexy—especially the part about how the city comes under attack when it pops up in the Feywild. I wondered why the eladrin didn't just pull up stakes and leave the city while it was parked in the natural world. Then it dawned on me that the city's art, architecture, and legacy are important to these folk; if the city returned to the Feywild undefended, the fomorians would destroy all of that. From there, I had to take only a few steps to marry this story to my concepts for the eladrin knight, a hero who mixes arcane power with martial power to "bampf" around the battlefield.

The eladrin protect their civilization just as humanoid races do in the natural world. The big difference is that eladrin have a knack for arcane magic. Why wouldn't eladrin knights merge their magical heritage with kick-butt fighting maneuvers? These knights safeguard elvenkind by using their racial advantages to good effect while still operating as martial defenders.

With my story nailed down (finally) and the mechanics bubbling up in my subconscious, I started cooking with the tech. The thing I really dig about classes from the Dungeons & Dragons Essentials™ books is that it's easy to replace discrete chunks of mechanics without needing to rebuild the class from the ground up. In this case, I cut out the *battle guardian* power and replaced it with *Feywild guardian*. The power does almost the same thing, except that it underscores the importance of Intelligence while also rewarding the character with a free teleport.

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Stephen: The highlight of the initial *Feywild guardian* power was the inclusion of the teleport before the attack that a knight would normally get in *battle guardian*. It countered the addition of the teleport by reducing the guaranteed damage the *battle guardian* power deals—the usual Strength modifier damage on a miss is replaced with damage equal to the Intelligence modifier instead. Although that provided a small nod to eladrin flavor by highlighting the Intelligence score, teleportation is a much clearer indication of the character's eladrin heritage. Now, where the *battle guardian* has a small amount of guaranteed damage, the *Feywild guardian* has a teleport, and it feels like a reasonable tradeoff.

Robert: Originally, I had two stances, but after a seventh look, I decided one of the stances was just ridiculous. I cut it and tightened up *flickering blade*. I felt this stance was crucial to reinforcing the character concept, since *fey step* is a one-trick pony in an encounter. This stance opens up the teleportation aspect of the eladrin by letting you dance around the bad guy with a teleport of up to 2 squares.

Stephen: This stance is comparable to *measured cut* from *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*. Each one is good in its own way: *Flickering blade* allows for more movement, and *measured cut* allows for any direction of movement.

Robert: Knight utility powers are all tied to skills. With this in mind, I wondered what an eladrin knight would do with Arcana. The three powers I designed showed just how eladrin knights can use their magical training to frustrate their enemies and foil enemy attacks. Teleports and mind control work for the class.

Stephen: Although the initial design required training in Arcana for the utility powers, which followed the model of many knight utility powers that have training in a class skill as a prerequisite, the requirement is a bit too burdensome for typical knight characters. Arcana isn't a class skill, so the requirement adds a feat prerequisite to take any of these powers. Thus, we removed the "trained in Arcana" requirement and replaced it with "must be eladrin." The flavor and mechanics of the powers still provide a sense that these powers come from the arcane side of eladrin.

Robert: Finally, we have the paragon path. I hadn't originally planned to put the eldritch knight here, but in thinking about the concept, it fit. I intentionally opened it up to other races, since I see little point in restricting the features to a single race or even a subset of races. A human might study with the Sword Guard, right? The features reinforce the defender nature, especially Eldritch Abduction, while also keeping up the theme of a highly mobile defender. The 11th-level feature Diversified Study is a nod to the path's roots as a fighter/wizard prestige class from 3rd Edition, and it also feeds back into the story concept of a magical knight. I figured an arcane encounter attack power would be a pretty tasty option for these guys in place of an extra *power strike*, especially if you invest in a close attack power such as *color spray* or *burning hands*.

Final Thoughts

Robert: The "Sword Guard of Astrazalian" article is a pretty big departure from the original concept, but it shows how ideas can evolve and take shape even after the process is under way. I still want to do an arrow-slinging cavalier, and maybe I'll get to it sometime soon. But I'm also excited about this spin on the knight, and I hope you are too.

Stephen: The concept also shows how we can further tailor classes to emphasize story. Many of our classes have potentially modular design, allowing us to tweak components of a class without needing to create an entire build or suite of powers.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer whose work is in numerous roleplaying supplements and accessories. His most recent work can be found in the *Dark Sun® Campaign Setting*, *Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, *Monster Manual® 3*, and *Player's Handbook® 3*. Robert lives in Tennessee. For a window into Robert's head be sure to check out http://www.robertjschwalb.com.

Stephen Schubert is a game developer for Wizards of the Coast, and is the Development Manager for RPGs and the Dungeons & Dragons game. He has provided development and design work for many 4th Edition D&D products, including the *Monster Manual* and *Player's Handbook* series, and the D&D Gamma World™ game.

Class Acts: Ardent
Empathic Champions

By Robert J. Schwalb
Illustrations by Mathias Kollros and Sean Murray

"My scholarship-minded peers have all sorts of theories about what, exactly, psionic energy is. I've heard it called magic, the talent . . . Heck, some funny-headed folk have this grand idea that it's some sort of Way, a path to enlightenment.

"Call it what you want, but in my experience the 'energy' is a language. Oh, I see that doesn't agree with you. Settle down, friend. Don't get all riled up. Let me explain before you storm off in a huff.

"Maybe the metaphor isn't quite there, but I think I'm close enough to the truth of it the other details will sort themselves out on their own. So I know the talent is far more refined and nuanced than a spoken tongue, and excepting a few folks who dabble in the gods' power, nobody's words can make another fellow's head explode. But I'm saying the talent has a vocabulary and a grammar lurking just below the surface. A trained mind can transmit ideas and shape reality based on those same ideas. It's not much different from how we make sense of the world by imposing our ideas and language upon it.

"Hang in there, friend. You know how you really can't hear anything when all you're doing is talking? Well, with psionic magic it's more or less the same thing. See, most folks with the talent use it only to talk. They rarely shut their mental mouths long enough to hear what others have to say. If you don't listen, then you can't grow your mind beyond your own voice. And if you can't learn, well, I'd say you're just plain ignorant.

"Look, you've got a talent, friend. I know all those voices that chatter in your brain box can be upsetting. Just remember, your gift lets you hear, learn,

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and grow. Who can get the drop on you when you can hear their thoughts? Don't you see the advantage you can pick up when you know the mood of the troops under your command? You'll feel their fear long before they break. But you don't need me to tell you about the advantages, because you can see them. I know you're trying it right now.

"That's why I've been rambling on. You needed a chance to listen."

The ardent can command the battlefield by psionically communicating ideas and emotions to other creatures. When the ardent feels elation, allies find their own spirits lift. When the ardent experiences certainty, the path ahead becomes clear for those fighting at the ardent's side.

Even among bold and courageous adventurers, ardents stand apart from most other classes. Where another trains and perfects combat talents, the ardent is an accidental hero—an individual who, more often than not, stumbles into supernatural power during a crisis. Extreme emotional or physical distress shatters the mind's safeguards and floods the body with psionic energy. In this state, the ardent must find a way to control the energy or be consumed by it.

Since there are few, if any, institutions set aside for helping ardents navigate the strange power they inherit, they develop their abilities in a haphazard fashion, finding their way to power through trial and error. For this reason, many ardents develop unusual abilities or allow their talent to evolve in unexpected ways. Ardents see sides of psionic power that well-trained psions miss, and they truly discover the depth of the mental power hidden deep in their psyches.

Player's Handbook 3 and *Psionic Power* explore the most common expressions of the ardent class, offering three distinct builds to describe the ways an ardent might use the discovered ability and how that ability translates into leadership qualities useful to any adventuring group. And though these broad categories prove useful for defining the major trends among the few who become ardents, they merely scratch the surface of what might be possible.

This article introduces new options for ardents who develop their empathic sides, leading by receiving information from their foes' minds, and using it to guide allies to victory. The empathic options described in the following pages are open to any ardent, regardless of build, and supply new power options at particular levels. You don't have to embrace every option here, but the more you invest in, the more your ardent adventurer will understand the other people of the world.

The Talent Manifests

There is no precise moment when an ardent discovers his or her empathic talent. It may be that the ardent always possessed the ability, long before learning to control psionic energy. Then again, it might appear deep into the ardent's career, an avenue revealed through exploring the depths of his or her unique abilities.

New Background: Empath

Long before you came into your psionic powers, you had a knack for reading the emotions in other people. You could always tell when something was wrong, bond with people who liked you, and sever connections with those who meant you harm. Close friends marveled when you finished their sentences. You had a gift, a talent that revealed itself in a profound way when you came into the fullness of your psionic ability. Your childhood tricks evolved into something more, until you could almost hear people's thoughts and read their moods and emotions as if they were words on a page.

Associated Skills: Diplomacy, Insight

Roleplaying Empathy

Too much connection with an enemy can be dangerous. When peering into a foe's mind, you see hopes and dreams, values and beliefs. These experiences can transform a faceless, nameless foe into an

OTHER EMPATHIC OPTIONS

Many existing mechanics provide other options for an empathic ardent. In addition to the powers included here, you should choose powers that let you react to another creature's emotions, read their thoughts, and perceive hidden dangers. Examples include *empathic recovery* (*Psionic Power,* page 19), *inverted emotions* (*Psionic Power,* page 20), and *vulnerability revealed* (*Psionic Power,* page 21).

The phrenic invader and siphon paragon paths (*Psionic Power*, pages 26 and 27) offer different ways to develop empathic talent, and the godmind epic destiny (*Player's Handbook 3*, page 157) represents the pinnacle of an empathic ardent's potential.

actual person. The connection makes it hard, if not impossible, for some to see the fatal contest through to its bloody conclusion. Empathic ardents sometimes pull their strikes, finding nonlethal solutions for overcoming their opponents. This awareness is so powerful that killing an opponent can be like killing oneself. An ardent must have a hard heart or face a thoroughly despicable foe to slay one whose mind has been laid bare.

Level 1: Intent Laid Bare

Every thinking creature emits flickering thoughts and emotions. Most people don't notice these subtle mental flares, and even you might have to pay close attention to pick them out. To access this information from an enemy, you find it best to grab its attention with a successful attack.

Intent Laid Bare — Ardent Attack 1

You slip into your opponent's mind while the pain from your attack distracts it.

At-Will ✦ Augmentable, Psionic, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] + Charisma modifier damage, and the target cannot shift until the end of your next turn.
Effect: You can communicate with the target via telepathy 5 until the end of your next turn.
Special: You can use this power unaugmented as a melee basic attack.

Augment 1
Effect: As above, and the target takes a –2 penalty on attack rolls that include you as a target until the end of your next turn.

Augment 2
Hit: 2[W] + Charisma modifier damage, and the target cannot shift until the end of your next turn.
Effect: As above, and until the end of your next turn, if the target moves, you or one ally within 5 squares of you can shift 1 square as a free action.

Level 2: Sympathetic Agony

Empathy lets another person's joys and hurts become your own. *Sympathetic agony* lets you share an ally's painful burden so it becomes bearable by you both.

Sympathetic Agony — Ardent Utility 2

You open your mind to receive an ally's agony, and take some of that pain upon yourself.

Encounter ✦ Psionic
Immediate Interrupt **Close** burst 5
Trigger: An ally within 5 squares of you takes damage from an attack.
Target: The triggering ally
Effect: The target takes half damage from the triggering attack. If the target would receive an effect that a save can end from the triggering attack, you can choose to have the effect apply to you instead. Until the end of your next turn, you and the target gain a +2 power bonus to defenses while you are within 5 squares of one another.

Level 6: Painful Revelations

Experiencing another creature's emotions is not always pleasant, especially when pain, fear, or madness crowd its thoughts. However, a creature's state of mind can reveal many clues about how you might defeat it. By opening yourself up to the creature's thoughts, you might experience significant pain, but you gain much in exchange.

Painful Revelations — Ardent Utility 6

You risk your sanity to share your enemy's pain, and in doing so gain powerful insights into how to bring this battle to a close.

Daily ✦ Aura, Psionic
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You activate an aura 5 that lasts until the end of the encounter or until you dismiss it as a minor action. Whenever an enemy in the aura takes damage from an attack, you can take 5 psychic damage that can't be reduced in any way. If you do so, that enemy grants combat advantage (save ends).

Level 7: Clarifying Impact

You find that creatures' minds often resemble the environments in which they find themselves. A chaotic and tempestuous battlefield confuses the mind with panic, worry, anger, and hatred. *Clarifying impact* lets you use these swirling emotions to track your enemy's movements and prevent its escape.

Clarifying Impact — **Ardent Attack 7**

Smashing your weapon into the enemy heightens your mind's ability to pick out concealed and hidden foes.

At-Will ✦ Augmentable, Psionic, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. AC
Hit: 1[W] + Charisma modifier damage.
Effect: Until the end of your next turn, the target does not benefit from partial cover or partial concealment on attacks made by you or allies adjacent to you.
Special: You can use this power unaugmented as a melee basic attack.

Augment 1
Effect: As above, but you also gain a +5 power bonus to Perception checks made to find hidden creatures until the end of your next turn.

Augment 2 (Aura)
Attack: Charisma vs. AC. If the target is adjacent to one of your allies, you have combat advantage for this attack.
Hit: 2[W] + Charisma modifier damage.
Effect: You activate an aura 5 that lasts until the end of your next turn. Enemies in the aura cannot benefit from partial cover or partial concealment.

Level 10: Unshakable Bond

Your ability to receive thoughts gives you uncanny access into a creature's mind. When a foe turns its attention on you, you send your consciousness barreling through your enemy's defenses and into its mind.

Unshakable Bond — **Ardent Utility 10**

When your enemy lets down its guard after making a successful attack, you invade its mind and steal its thoughts.

Daily ✦ Psionic
Free Action **Close** burst 5
Trigger: An enemy hits your ally with an attack.
Target: The triggering enemy
Effect: You subject the target to your unshakable bond until the end of the encounter or until it drops to 0 hit points. While the target is subject to your unshakable bond, you always know its exact location and your attacks against it ignore any cover or concealment.

Paragon Path: Contemplative Ardent

Prerequisite: Ardent

From the time you first felt another's emotion, from the moment you experienced another's thought, you have struggled against the flood that threatens to drown out your identity. It seemed you would never grow comfortable with your strange talent—and yet, against all odds, you did. You developed your concentration to drive back outside influences, but you still can't remember the last time you were alone in your head.

Training, focus, or natural adaptability has let you control the voices invading your thoughts. You can now single them out and use them to warn you of hidden dangers or to find ways around a foe's defenses. In effect, your supernatural senses give you cues to leading and fighting in battle.

Level 11: Telepathic Mind

You can hear and transmit thoughts to other creatures.

Benefit: You gain telepathy 5. If you already have telepathy, you increase its range by 5. The first time you drop to 0 power points in an encounter, each ally within the range of your telepathy gains a +2 power bonus to attack rolls until the end of your next turn.

Level 11: Contemplative Action

You use the pain and hurt sensed in others to help you push beyond your normal limits.

Benefit: Whenever you spend an action point to make an attack, you gain a bonus to the attack roll and the damage roll equal to the number of bloodied creatures within range of your telepathy.

Level 11: Paragon Power Points

Your ability to draw and use psionic energy grows.

Benefit: You gain 2 additional power points.

Level 11: Thought Harvest

Although you can pick up thoughts from sentient creatures, they are usually surface thoughts, random and disjointed. Using psionic energy, you can burrow a hole through an opponent's mental defenses to peer into that creature's thoughts.

Benefit: You gain the *thought harvest* power.

Thought Harvest — Contemplative Ardent — Attack 11

As your attack draws your enemy's attention, you sneak through its mental defenses to see into its mind and discover its next move.

Encounter ✦ Augmentable, Psionic, Psychic, Weapon
No Action **Melee** weapon
Trigger: You hit an enemy with an unaugmented at-will ardent attack power.
Target: The enemy you hit
Effect: The target takes 5 extra psychic damage, and it is subject to your thought harvest until the end of your next turn. While subject to your thought harvest, the target cannot shift, and it takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls and to all defenses against attacks by you or by any of your allies within range of your telepathy.
Augment 2
Effect: As above, but the target takes 10 extra psychic damage.

Level 12: Sleeper Awakens

You learn how to put yourself into a combat trance. In this state, you filter out distractions so you can read your enemies' minds with terrifying accuracy.

Benefit: You gain the *sleeper awakens* power.

Sleeper Awakens — Contemplative Ardent — Utility 12

Your eyes become white, and your corona flares. Your enemies are as insects to you.

Daily ✦ Psionic, Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You enter the awakened sleeper stance. Until the stance ends, you gain a +5 power bonus to Insight checks, and enemies cannot gain combat advantage against you by flanking. In addition, you can use the secondary power at will.
Secondary Power
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: An enemy attacks you or an ally adjacent to you.
Effect: You shift up to 2 squares.

Level 16: Inverted Corona

When you use your psionic energy to heal the injured, you draw the pain and hurt into yourself and then quash it with your mind. Other creatures feel this phenomenon and are involuntarily drawn to you.

Benefit: Whenever you enable an ally to spend a healing surge, you can pull one or two allies within range of your telepathy up to 2 squares as a free action.

Level 20: Open the Floodgates

For anyone other than an empath, emotions and thoughts sensed in others are without weight, appearing and fading. For you, though, they linger in your consciousness. When you can carry them no further, you release them in a furious attack against your foes.

Benefit: You gain the *open the floodgates* power.

Open the Floodgates — Contemplative Ardent — Attack 20

You release all the emotions and thoughts you've absorbed, smashing your enemies' minds with a psychic flood.

Daily ✦ Psionic, Psychic, Weapon
Standard Action **Close** blast 3
Target: Each creature in the blast
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 2[W] + Charisma modifier damage, and the target is weakened and takes ongoing 10 psychic damage (save ends both).
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: You shift up to 4 squares to a square in or adjacent to the blast.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is an award-winning game designer who has contributed design to or developed nearly two hundred roleplaying game titles for the Dungeons & Dragons® game, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars RPG*, and the d20 system. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *D&D Gamma World: Famine in Far-Go*™, *Dark Sun*® *Campaign Setting*, and *Monster Manual 3*®. Also, he's a regular contributor to both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. For more information about the author, be sure to check out his website at www.robertjschwalb.com.

Channel Divinity
Windswept Lord

By Chris Sims
Illustration by Slawomir Maniak

If you fall, you might meet a rover in the mists of the cold, lifeless crags. He'll have a beard the color of snow and clothing of cave-bear fur. Mayhap he'll wear armor of carved stone, and he'll carry a mace and shield. No mountain gear will he have, nor water, nor food. He'll look upon you with a smile in his eyes, though his mouth be set in grim resolve.

When you meet him, fear not, for your worries are over. You look upon Kord on his way to visit the Stone Father in the halls of the celestial mountains, and you're already dead! He'll lead you to Moradin's doorstep, but he'll not carry you. So, drink up! You'll need your strength for tomorrow!

—A Kord Clan toast

Dwarves revere Moradin as their maker and liberator. He carved dwarves from stone and earth, forged their souls on his anvil, and imbued them with a love of clan, craft, and mine. When Moradin freed the dwarves from enslavement by the giants during the Dawn War, he taught his people to fight against slavery and injustice. He instilled in them a drive to endure and to leave a lasting mark in legend if not in steel and stone.

Moradin is no lover of combat; he fights only when he must. But dwarves have been warriors since their earliest days, fighting to keep hearth and home safe and mines clear of danger. Dwarves know battle, and because of that, they love Kord.

Kord is strength, fury, and steadfast courage. He is might used with skill and control. A battle cry given in a last, glorious charge is as much Kord's roar as is a boom of thunder. To dwarves, Kord's voice echoes in the smithy with each hammer fall. Kord speaks when a volcano thunders, when ash clouds spark lightning, and when the restless earth rumbles.

Dwarves also see Kord as the father of mountain squalls and mists. He is a grim wanderer of barren peaks and mountain glaciers. For his role in history, Kord is also a symbol of redemption among the dwarves.

Winter Rebirth

In the early days of the Dawn War, Moradin went into battle to liberate the dwarves from their elemental masters. He did so again in the latter days to join in the War of Winter, during which the gods faced

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off against Khala, mighty and ancient goddess of savage cold.

Kord, Khala's son, was wilder then. He fought on his mother's side against Celestia. Moradin battled the storm god upon the heavenly mountains and across the world. Kord unleashed his full fury but succeeded only in wreaking terrible damage on the land and its mortal inhabitants.

When Kord took a moment to renew his strength for another blow, Moradin called his attention to the wanton destruction wrought by the storm god's wrath.

Kord surveyed the desolation. He saw strength turned to mere destructive force and recklessness rivaling Gruumsh's brainless barbarism. Barring divine intervention, no chance of renewal remained in the death he had sown. Kord regretted using his might so carelessly and destructively.

"In this, you see Khala's entire aim," said Moradin. "A world left barren even of hope."

The thought gave Kord pause, and Moradin went on, chipping away at the god's resolve. His words struck the storm god's heart. In Moradin, Kord saw not only a worthy foe but also a being who showed great skill and discipline—ideals superior to reckless force. The storm god renounced his support of Khala's plan to rule a brutal, icebound world. Moradin made armaments of stone and steel for his new ally, and Kord bound their hilts in tanned bearskin. Soon after, Kord launched a direct assault against Gruumsh and crushed his erstwhile ally.

One by one, Khala's allies fell, yet she would not submit. She ultimately met defeat at the hands of Pelor, Moradin, and Bane. In exchange for power over winter, the Raven Queen banished the defeated goddess into death. Dwarves claim, however, that Kord was present at his mother's passing and that he claimed some of her power. It is whispered in dwarven halls that, at this ancient moment, Kord and the nameless goddess of death began an unconsummated courtship that continues today.

Storming Mountains

Kord spends his time wandering the planes. He favors mountainous landscapes, including the mountains of Celestia, Letherna, and—before the primal spirits' ban—the world. Barren crags remind him of his awakening in his battle with Moradin. On the lower slopes of Celestia, near the entrances to Moradin's great halls, Kord occasionally meets the honored dwarven dead.

To dwarves, Kord is as much a deity of the earth as of the sky. He is god of the surface peaks that lie atop dwarven delves. Above the tree line, where vegetation and life is at a minimum, is Kord's realm. Mountain mists and winds are his signs among the upthrust earth and stone; cinder cones, earth tremors, and roaring lava streams are his tokens on and within the land.

As depicted in dwarven myth, Kord is a contemplative drifter who challenges himself in the harshest environments creation has to offer. Sudden snowstorms are his darker musings. Peaceful, clear days are his gift. Creatures of the alpine slopes—bighorn sheep, bears, mountain lions, and the like—are his to influence. That Kord occasionally speaks through ravens is a part of dwarven lore that reinforces rumors of his relationship with the Raven Queen. After all, battle and death go hand in hand.

Aloof Fury

Dwarves see Kord as darkly judgmental of weakness and given to great mirth at the physical struggles of mortals. He is the giver of strength and physical aptitude, but he expects the recipients of such endowments to hone their raw talent and develop their skill. Kord gives only the means of survival. The beneficiary of such gifts must make good use of them or fail through individual weakness.

Kord expresses a wide range of emotion, and his moods are manifested in the stereotypical dwarven demeanor. Like Kord, dwarves display boisterousness, melancholy, gruffness, humor, wrath, severity, tenacity, and independence. From Moradin they draw practicality, loyalty, altruism, and industriousness. The combination creates a truly formidable people, and it is little wonder that dwarves have been so successful in the world.

Character Development

The vision of Kord as a grim, moody, and sometimes jovial warrior and rover of the mountains has extensively influenced dwarven culture. Dwarves swear by Kord's name, by his beard, by his fists and sinews, even by his bushy brows. They make oaths to him and boast or toast with his name on their lips. Dwarven prayers to Kord can sound blasphemous by the standards of some deities, since dwarves curse Kord if he fails to provide aid.

Divine Powers

Dwarves believe that Kord marks those who please him with their dauntless courage. He blesses those who fall, and his strength empowers them to rise again and fight on. Anyone who comes close to death in battle but recovers without apparent aid is said to have been touched by Kord.

Kord's Relentlessness — Level 5+ Rare

Kord marks you, who have survived deadly combat through strength and fortitude alone, rendering you indomitable in battle.

Lvl 5	1,000 gp	Lvl 20	125,000 gp
Lvl 10	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	3,125,000 gp

Divine Boon

Property: You gain a +2 item bonus to death saving throws. When you use your second wind, you gain a +2 item bonus to your next damage roll with a melee weapon attack before the end of your next turn.
Level 15-20: +4 item bonus to the damage roll
Level 25-30: +6 item bonus to the damage roll

Power (Encounter): No Action. *Trigger:* You spend a healing surge while prone. *Effect:* You can stand up as a free action.

Power (Daily ✦ Healing): No Action. *Trigger:* You succeed on a saving throw. *Effect:* You regain hit points equal to the level of this boon.

Magical Themes

Thunder and lightning are a given with Kord. For dwarves, fire and earth are also within Kord's influence. Volcanoes are Kord's favorite mountains. Their lightning-filled ash plumes are like the clouds of his tempests. Dwarf sorcerers are said to be Kord's chosen whether they worship him or not.

Smiths in dwarven forges give thanks to the storm god for the magma and steam of the deep earth. They fashion items from remarkable materials such as the renowned substance Kordium and dedicate weapons, armor, and implements to Kord.

Users of primal power among dwarves consider Kord a natural fury despite his divinity. His friends are spirits of storm, wind, volcano, and earthquake. His passing thunderstorms leave behind highly valued *stormglass shards* in the earth, which can magnify the effect of thunder and lightning attacks.

Kord also guards and guides honored ancestors. Dwarf primalists revere Kord even if they do not worship him. Many believe the spirits might allow Kord into the world if the primal ban were not so strict.

Kordium Weapon — Level 9+ Uncommon

The blood-red, scarlet and black swirling throughout this stronger-than-steel dwarven weapon are mute reminders of the wrath of Kord that seethes within.

Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp			

Weapon: Any melee

Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d8 fire and thunder damage per plus

Power (Daily ✦ Fire, Thunder): No Action. *Trigger:* You deal damage using this weapon. *Effect:* You gain an item bonus to the damage roll equal to twice this item's enhancement bonus, and you can change the damage type of the triggering damage to fire and thunder.

Warrior Ideal

Kord's ethos is the basis for the dwarven warrior ideal, with enough of Moradin's tenets thrown in to make for coherent battle lines and plans. Dwarf warriors are straightforward, audacious, and tough. They prefer direct assault and steadfast resistance to subterfuge and complicated strategies. Squads of dwarf troopers shout battle cries to declare their presence before attacking, relying on shock, awe, and grit to see them through.

Battle-trained dwarves of all stripes give reverence to Kord. Dwarf avengers, evokers, battleminds, fighters, monks, paladins, rogues, warpriests, and others strive to live up to the standard he epitomizes. Dwarves believe that Kord particularly esteems warriors—such as barbarians, battleragers, brawlers, slayers, and tempests—who fight with bold styles or berserker rage. In fact, the Common word "berserk" comes from the Dwarven word "barsark," which is the traditional bear-fur cloak or bear-hide armor worn by battle-crazed dwarf warriors. The clothing became synonymous with the warriors who wore it.

Stormglass Shard — Level 6+ Uncommon

With a blinding flash and a thunderclap, the storm god's fury strikes the earth, leaving behind jagged-edged glass that is potently magical.

Lvl 6	75 gp	Lvl 26	45,000 gp
Lvl 16	1,800 gp		

Reagent

Power (Consumable): Free Action. *Trigger:* You use a 5th-level or lower lightning or thunder power and damage a target. *Effect:* You push that target up to 2 squares. If the target cannot be pushed, it falls prone.
Level 16: 15th-level or lower power; 4 squares.
Level 26: 25th-level or lower power; 6 squares.

Kord Clan

Clans—extended groups of both relations and allies—are vital to dwarven culture. A dwarf without a clan has no home and no ties to his or her people. When a dwarf is left without a clan—through war, plague, natural disaster, or exile—he or she can rarely find solace within another clan.

The Kord Clan provides an option for those dwarves. Over the centuries, it has become an established, if nontraditional, clan in its own right. In its early centuries, most members of the Kord Clan were survivors, refugees, and orphans. Now, children who have known no other life are born into the Kord Clan. Much is expected of such born fighters.

Members of the Kord Clan set themselves apart from normal dwarven society by taking on unusual or uncouth appearances. Such distinctions might consist of tattoos or scars, sometimes incorporating marks of outlawry. A Kord Clan dwarf might shave his beard, hair, or both. In wider dwarven society, all of these are marks of rebellion, if not shame.

Every Kord Clan member is a warrior, including the all-important priests of Kord who lead the clan. Kord Clan warriors volunteer for the most dangerous duties. Companies of Kord Clan berserkers make up frontline shock troops in dwarven armies. The clan also produces a disproportionate number of adventurers.

Kord Clan members seek glory not only for its own sake but also for the opportunities for redemption or freedom it can provide. In a reflection of Kord's reformation during his ancient battle with Moradin, valiant service in the Kord Clan can win accolades in dwarven society. Outlaws and dishonored dwarves, as well as those adopted or born into the clan, can win the right to rejoin the normal social order through glorious exploits. Some even earn the privilege of forming their own clans. Yet many who have earned these honors stay with the Kord Clan out of pride, loyalty, or a renewed sense of duty.

Background: You are a member of the Kord Clan. Were you born to the clan, or did unfortunate circumstances lead to your joining? What is your place in the clan? In what ways do you break dwarven customs in your behavior and appearance? What led you to leave the clan-hold and take up adventuring? Are you an exile from another clan, out to perform great deeds that will redeem your standing in dwarven society and earn you the privilege of returning to your ancestral home?

Associated Skills: Athletics, Intimidate

Personal Quests: Rectify and atone for the misdeed that caused your exile; safeguard refugees from war or disaster on their journey to your Kord Clan stronghold; assemble a company of Kord Clan berserkers and lead it to victory in a major war.

About the Author

Chris Sims has played roleplaying games for 30 years, and he has helped produce games for nearly 10. Before he laired in the Seattle exurbs, he was an editor/designer at Wizards of the Coast. There, he worked on the Duel Masters®, Dungeons & Dragons®, and Magic: The Gathering® games. Now he blogs about the D&D game for critical-hits.com and is up to no good as a game-industry freelancer.

Updated: February 2, 2011

Dragon # 395 | Editorial Archive | 1/4/2011 New!

Bastions of Responsibility

Dragon Editorial

by Steve Winter

One of the articles slated for *Dragon* this month is a piece on strongholds for player characters—what a stronghold is, why you want one, and how you get one.

The idea that powerful player characters should be in the business of building strongholds goes back to the very first set of **Dungeons & Dragons** rules. Volume 3, *The Underworld & Wilderness Adventures*, covered the topic with four sentences followed by a page of illustrations showing the individual structures that could be assembled like modules into a functional castle: small, medium, and large towers; 90 feet of curtain wall, 10 feet thick; gatehouses, drawbridges, barbettes, and barbicans; stone stairs, iron doors, windows, and arrow slits.

Then there were the specialists you could hire to staff your stronghold: alchemists, engineers, men-at-arms, sages, spies, and half-a-dozen more categories of NPCs who would be highly useful around your burgeoning castle.

Why would you do such a thing? The real heart of that question was tackled in a following three-paragraph section entitled "Baronies." Being the master of a stronghold would eventually make you master of the surrounding territory. This wasn't a job for the weak of heart or for worn-out adventurers seeking a cozy retirement. It required active patrolling across the countryside to hunt down and eradicate monsters, thereby making the area safe for settlement and civilization.

In short, building a stronghold

- gave players something constructive to do with all of their characters' accumulated gold and other treasure;
- lifted their gaze to responsibilities beyond the dungeon's exit; and
- was a means of driving back the leading edge of darkness by expanding the points of light in the campaign (although those terms were still decades in the future).

Every one of those reasons is still valid now.

What makes a stronghold such an interesting choice for characters is the effect it can have on the campaign. It's one thing to be a wandering hero—even one who fights only in the cause of righteousness and virtue—and something else entirely to plant your feet, spread your arms, and announce to the countryside, "Here is where I am, and here is where I'll stay. You will find safety behind these walls; that is my pledge."

Of course, that's not the point of all strongholds. Some are just safe places to store belongings during your travels and to recuperate between adventures.

But a stronghold can be much more than that if players decide to take the high road of responsibility. By mid-paragon tier, your characters are paragons, and as someone's uncle taught us, with great power there must also come great responsibility.

This isn't a road all players will step onto, but for those who do, it leads to a whole new type of adventure and

reward.

Have your characters ever built a stronghold and driven back the tide of darkness from behind its stout walls? Does that type of campaign excite or bore you? Share your ideas and experiences at dndinsider@wizards.com.

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Dragon # 395 | Ampersand Archive | 1/12/2011

Icy Winds of Fortune

Ampersand

by Bill Slavicsek

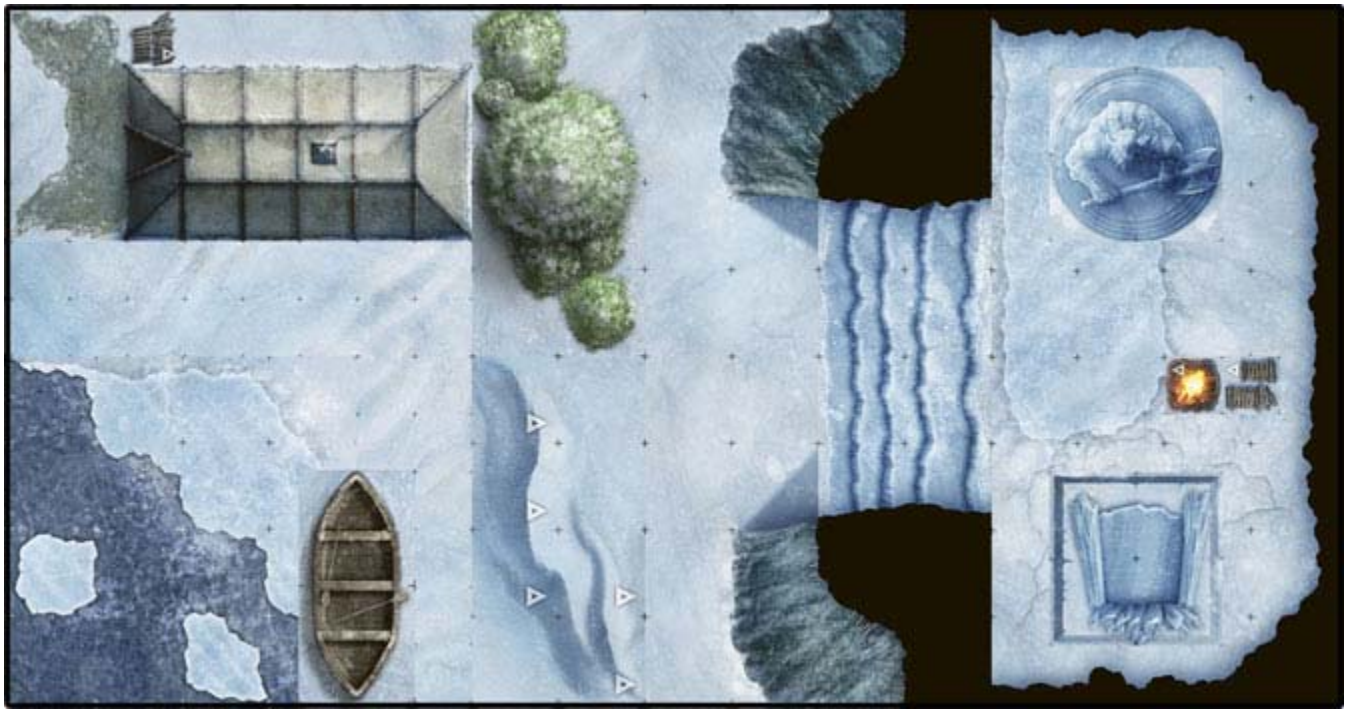
Happy New Year, everybody! Let's kick it into high gear with some news, previews, and other fun tidbits tied to our favorite heroic fantasy—the **Dungeons & Dragons** game!

Coming Soon: A New D&D Movie

We just wrapped up a contest tied to the new Syfy Original Movie *Dungeons & Dragons: The Book of Vile Darkness*. We'll announce the winner shortly, and that lucky individual will get to play his or her D&D character in the film. Our own Dungeon Master to the Stars, Chris Perkins, has been consulting with screenwriter Brian Rudnick and helping to get the D&D details right. We'll have more news about this exciting project after filming is completed and we get closer to the movie's air date. In the meantime, watch http://www.wizards.com/dnd/promotions.aspx for the announcement of the contest winner as well as for other D&D-related contests as they appear.

Frosty Tiles

The weather outside is frightful (at least in some parts of the country!), so what better way to pass the winter doldrums than by exploring the frozen dungeons of the D&D RPG? On sale now, look for the newest set of D&D *Dungeon Tiles*, *Caverns of Icewind Dale*. It contains six heavy cardstock sheets portraying icy cavern corridors, snow-packed wilderness, and a variety of special features designed to heat up the coldest adventure—including ice thrones, frozen chasms, patches of slippery ice, huts, fire pits, and fur rugs. Here's a sample dungeon we put together using pieces from this set.



Fortune Cards

A new accessory for the D&D roleplaying game debuts next month. *Dungeons & Dragons Fortune Cards: Shadows over Nentir Vale* provide fun new ways to tackle the challenges of any adventure. Each pack of eight random Fortune Cards give your characters in-game benefits and brief power-ups without adding more complexity to the game. Specifically designed for use in D&D RPG home games and the D&D Encounters in-store play program, Fortune Cards are themed so that you can build a deck suited to your character's style of play.

Here are a couple of examples from the initial set of 80 cards. You don't have to collect them all to make use of Fortune Cards. They actually work best when you either pop open a booster during play or when you use two or three boosters to build a deck for your character.

Dungeons & Dragons Fortune Cards hit store shelves early next month and are available only in locations participating in the D&D Encounters in-store play program. Try them out in your next adventure!

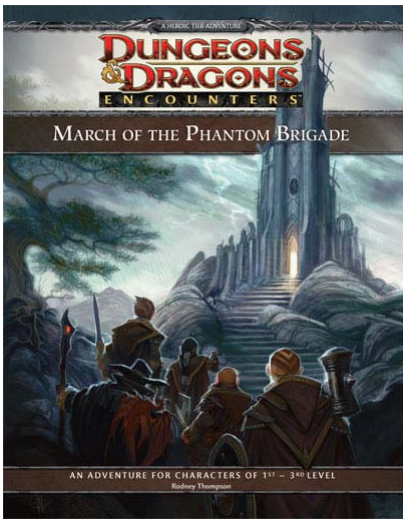
ATTACK
Mano a Mano
Play at the start of your turn.
Until the end of this turn, you gain a bonus to damage rolls against enemies that have no creatures adjacent to them other than you. The bonus equals 1 + one-half your level.

ATTACK
Mind Over Metal
Play at the start of your turn.
The first attack roll you make this turn targets Will instead of the defense the attack normally targets.

TACTIC
Push Through the Crowd
Play at the start of your turn.
Until the end of this turn, you can move through enemies' spaces. Enemies that make opportunity attacks against you on this turn gain combat advantage with those attacks.

New D&D Encounters Season

There are still a few weeks remaining in the *Keep on the Borderlands* storyline. Chapter 5 debuts this week, and there's still time to create a character and jump into the game! Check out your nearest retailer participating in the popular in-store play program. Find a store near you by clicking on this link http://www.wizards.com/dnd/Event.aspx?x=dnd/4new/event/dndencounters.



And in early February, the next season of D&D Encounters kicks off with *March of the Phantom Brigade*. The adventure begins with an expedition into the ruins of Castle Inverness. The entire season features more of what players have demanded—more exploration, more opportunities for roleplaying, and a story that puts the adventurers right in the middle of a struggle between the people of the Nentir Vale and a powerful ghost bent on revenge. With encounter locales from across the Nentir Vale and ties to the classic *Ghost Tower of Inverness* module, each week of adventure features a cast of characters that you can get to know and love (or hate) as the season progresses.

The new season makes use of the optional D&D Fortune Cards, as well as featuring monsters and other threats from Monster Vault: Threats of the Nentir Vale. If you haven't tried D&D Encounters yet, now's a great time to jump in!

D&D RPG Product Release Updates

Despite the best laid plans, sometimes we make changes to the D&D product release schedule. Usually this happens well before we've communicated our plans, but sometimes we must make changes to schedules that have already been announced. That happens to be the case we have here.

We have made the decision to depart from prepainted plastic miniatures sets. *Lords of Madness* stands as the final release under that model. We will continue to release special collector's sets (such as the *Beholder Collector's Set* we released last fall), as well as make use of plastic figures in other product offerings. Check out the *Wrath of Ashardalon* board game next month for the latest example of this. Moving forward, we will continue to explore more options for players to represent characters and monsters on the tabletop, including *Monster Vault* and other D&D products that feature monster and character tokens.

The *Heroes of Shadow* product, originally scheduled for March and presented in digest-sized, paperback format, is moving to April to accommodate a change to hardcover format. Additionally, three D&D RPG products have been removed from the 2011 release schedule—*Class Compendium: Heroes of Sword and Spell, Mordenkainen's Magnificent Emporium*, and *Hero Builder's Handbook*. While this means fewer books, we plan to deliver just as much great content for players this year through other formats, including board games, accessories, and digital offerings. I'll keep you up-to-date on the latest releases each month as we go along.

Finally, I wanted to let you know that we're making a change to the way we handle *D&D Insider* content. Subscriber data informs us that the vast majority of you consume our articles individually, when they are posted, as opposed to downloading the monthly compilations. So, starting this month, we're just providing the articles. There won't be any more monthly downloadable compilations. This is not a reduction in content, just a clarification of presentation and putting the emphasis where the majority of you are using it. Corrections and updates to articles which used to appear only in the compilations will now be made to the individual articles a few weeks after the original posting.

D&D Experience

This year, D&D Experience happens in Fort Wayne, Indiana from January 27-30. In addition to lots of D&D gaming, members of the D&D R&D Team, including Mike Mearls, Chris Perkins, and Greg Bilsland, will be on hand to run games, present seminars, and otherwise interact with the D&D community. We hope to see you there! Visit the D&D Experience website for more information.

On a Lighter Note

What could be more frightening than the classic *Tomb of Horrors* adventure? How about if we add bunnies to the mix of deadly tricks and traps? Take a look at our new media hub. It features an animated expedition into the Tomb of Horrors by famed 30-Second Bunnies Theater creator Jennifer Shiman. Amazing!

Next Time …

… more news and surprises from the halls of D&D R&D. In the meantime, look for the debut of two new columns later this month. First, Mike Mearls presents "Legends & Lore," infused with a heavy dose of game theory as Mike explores past editions and influences and how they inform the game today. Then, Chris Perkins delves into the "Dungeon Master's Experience," where he uses his long-running home campaign to provide awesome ideas, hooks, and staging for everyone else to take advantage of. I'm looking forward to seeing how these develop in the months ahead.

Until then, keep playing!

In Case You Don't Know Him

Bill Slavicsek's gaming life was forever changed when he discovered **Dungeons & Dragons** in 1976. He became a gaming professional in 1986 when he was hired by West End Games as an editor. He quickly added developer, designer, and creative manager to his resume, and his work helped shape the *Paranoia*, *Ghostbusters*, *Star Wars*, and *Torg* roleplaying games. He even found some time during that period to do freelance work for D&D 1st Edition. In 1993, Bill joined the staff of TSR, Inc. as a designer/editor. He worked on a bunch of 2nd Edition material, including products for Core D&D, *Dark Sun*, *Ravenloft*, and *Planescape*. In 1997, he was part of the TSR crowd that moved to Seattle to join Wizards of the Coast, and in that year he was promoted to R&D Director for D&D. In that position, Bill oversaw the creation of both the 3rd Edition and 4th Edition of the D&D Roleplaying Game. He was one of the driving forces behind the *D&D Insider* project, and he continues to oversee and lead the creative strategy and effort for **Dungeons & Dragons**.

Bill's enormous list of credits includes *Alternity*, *d20 Star Wars*, *The Mark of Nerath* Dungeons & Dragon novel, *Eberron Campaign Setting*, the *D&D For Dummies* books, and his monthly *Ampersand (&)* column for *Dragon*

Magazine.

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Dragon # 395 | RPGA Report Archive | 1/17/2011

Warm Up Your Winter with D&D!

D&D Play Spotlight

by Chris Tulach

The weather may be nasty and cold, or nice and warm, but no matter what Mother Nature brings, Wizards has some pretty sweet events and programs lined up over the next few weeks. This month, get more details on D&D Experience, the next season of D&D Encounters, and a sneak peek into a cool reward perk arriving for our most dedicated D&D Encounters Dungeon Masters!

D&D Experience 2011: January 26-30

Once again this year, Fort Wayne, Indiana plays host to the spotlight D&D convention—D&D Experience! Consisting of four solid days of great D&D games, seminars, swag, and exclusive access to Wizards folk, it's the place to be for D&D fans! Check out some of the special programming at the show this year (listed below), or hit up the D&D Experience website run by the convention organizer, David Christ. Registration is still open, or show up onsite at the Grand Wayne Convention Center anytime during the weekend to get in on the action.

Special Guests

D&D Experience will have the following Wizards of the Coast special guests: Mike Mearls (R&D), Chris Perkins (R&D), Greg Bilsland (R&D), Trevor Kidd (Community), Michael Robles (Community), Andy Heckt (OP), and Chris Tulach (OP). They'll be hosting seminars, playing and DMing games, and generally being about to chat up throughout the show. In addition, the show will feature other D&D special guests made famous through print and the wonders of the internet—for a full list of these fabulous folks, head to the D&D Experience special guests page.

Exclusive Games

D&D Experience will have a brand-new adventure written by Shawn Merwin called "Kalarel's Revenge," which features an exclusive look at *Heroes of Shadow, Monster Vault: Threats to the Nentir Vale*, and other surprises! In addition, the DM's Challenge this year will be **D&D Gamma World** themed, as players explore the post-apocalyptic hometowns of their DMs. Great special events like the board game challenge, the Baldman Games/Critical Hits Open Tournament "Murder at Time's End," and numerous other custom games offer all sorts of one-off play experiences. And for all the campaigners out there, D&D Experience offers plenty of Living Forgotten Realms games (including another battle interactive "Swarm of Chaos") and the launch of the Ashes of Athas convention campaign! Check out the D&D Experience events page for more details.

Great Seminars

Every day at D&D Experience, you can get inside scoops, participate in gripping discussions, and interact with some of the industry's experts through the seminar track. All of the Wizards seminars run at 1-3 pm and 4-6 pm daily (except Sunday, which is 1-3 pm only). Highlights include the ever-popular Product Spotlight, a live D&D Virtual Table gameplay experience, and our always engaging adventure design seminar—now with information on freelancing for Wizards! Head over to the D&D Experience seminars page to get all the info.

Sweet Swag

You braved the frigid Indiana winter to be here, and we'd like to show you our thanks by having lots of great takeaway promos available throughout the show. Some stuff will magically appear when you arrive and check in, and other items will be available for participating in certain events. Hitting up "Kalarel's Revenge" will net you an

opportunity to try out the new *D&D Fortune Cards*, while you can compete for a copy of *Wrath of Ashardalon* through the board game challenge. You'll find board game and **D&D Gamma World** promos greeting you in your swag bag, and other cool exclusives just might be found if you keep an eye open.

D&D Encounters New Season: February 9

On February 9th, the next season of D&D Encounters arrives with "March of the Phantom Brigade," written by Rodney Thompson. This adventure promises an engaging storyline and a can't-miss finale. You'll want to play every Wednesday!

We discussed some program details last month, and here's a little story preview along with some other first looks for you to peruse while you get ready to face off against an ancient evil in the Ghost Tower!

Adventure Introduction

The adventure begins with the heroes as part of a caravan of pilgrims setting out to found a town in the ruins of Castle Inverness. The heroes are 1st-level adventurers who have been hired to ensure that the caravan reaches Inverness safely. Here's the opening read-aloud text:

> *You and your companions stand huddled in the chill of early morning, blowing clouds of mist with every breath. Dawn is just breaking, and the shadowed walls of Hammerfast loom above you. A caravan of settlers is preparing to depart, and you are among them.*
>
> *Some months ago, a call went out from the temple of Moradin in Hammerfast seeking able-bodied settlers to establish a new town to the southwest. Desiring to settle in this new town, you answered the call and now stand in a field outside the town awaiting the caravan's departure.*

Keeping It Simple: Start at 1st Level

Starting this season, all characters start at 1st level, regardless of when the player starts the season. In addition, you'll level up when you obtain enough XP to make your levels. There are no "level bumps." This makes it easy for new players to join at any point during the season and rewards players who attend each week by giving them a faster track to gaining their levels.

Essentials Characters

We're keeping it straightforward again this season by spotlighting the *D&D Essentials* line for character creation. You can create a character using *Heroes of the Fallen Lands, Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*, and any *Dragon* magazine article content that has the icons of those two books on the article's title page. In addition, the DDI Character Builder has all the details already pre-loaded into a campaign setting for "March of the Phantom Brigade" (available approximately one week before the season begins).

If you want to just jump right in and play, you can pick up one of the pre-generated characters to start while you're trying to decide what to make for the next week!

New Treasure Distribution

This season, instead of receiving specific magic items for treasure, the DM is instructed to roll on a chart to award an item, potentially giving each group that plays at your local store a different variety of gear. In fact, here's the chart, straight from the adventure.

TREASURE TABLE

d20	RESULT	d20	RESULT
1	2 potions of healing	11	+1 dwarven armor
2	+1 magic armor	12	+1 orb of inevitable continuance
3	+1 magic weapon	13	+1 rod of deadly casting
4	+1 magic holy symbol	14	+1 luck blade
5	+1 amulet of protection	15	+1 delver's armor
6	+1 magic wand, orb, staff, or rod	16	+1 lightning wand

7	+1 veteran's armor	17	ironskin belt
8	+1 vicious weapon	18	+1 amulet of health
9	+1 safewing amulet	19	+1 flaming weapon
10	+1 symbol of life	20	+1 staff of storms

D&D Fortune Card Rewards

Starting this season, the D&D Encounters cards offered in previous seasons have been replaced with a new gameplay enhancement, *D&D Fortune Cards*. As you earn Renown Points this season, you'll get access to exclusive *D&D Fortune Cards* that are not available anywhere else! You'll earn cards at 20, 40, and 60 Renown Points. In addition, we've upped the number of cards available at the higher thresholds, ensuring that more players can get access to the rewards that take a bigger commitment to earn.

ATTACK
ONE MORE CHANCE
Play at the start of your turn.
If you have no encounter attack powers remaining, the first enemy you hit this turn takes 5 extra damage.
PROMO 1

DEFENSE
CAUTIOUS MANEUVER
Play at the start of your turn.
Until the end of this turn, you take half damage from opportunity attacks made against you.
PROMO 2

Thank You DMs!

Did you go the distance last year with a D&D Encounters season at your local store? Were you a DMing all-star week in and week out? We're thanking you, our most dedicated D&D Encounters DMs, with a care package of goodies sent to your store, directly to your attention! These thank-you packages include a special "DM Thank You" Token Set designed by Gale Force Nine, a copy of the D&D novel *Mark of Nerath*, a special *D&D Fortune Card*, and a really kick-ass 2011 D&D Calendar! Packages should be arriving at your D&D Encounters stores in early February.

Next month, stay tuned for a D&D Experience wrap-up report and information on PAX East in Boston. Good gaming!

About the Author

Originally thought to have been raised from a humble Midwestern family, Chris Tulach actually fell to Earth in a meteorite-shaped capsule flung from a planet far outside our galaxy. While under the yellow rays of Sol, Chris's nerdity far surpasses that of any normal human. Using this precious gift only for good, he has become the D&D Organized Play Content Developer, responsible for the development and deployment of **Dungeons & Dragons** organized play programs. He is also the co-author of E2, *Kingdom of the Ghouls*.

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Dungeon # 395 | D&D Alumni Archive | 1/26/2011 New!

Modrons' March

D&D Alumni

Bart Carroll

"To look at one modron is to look at all of them."

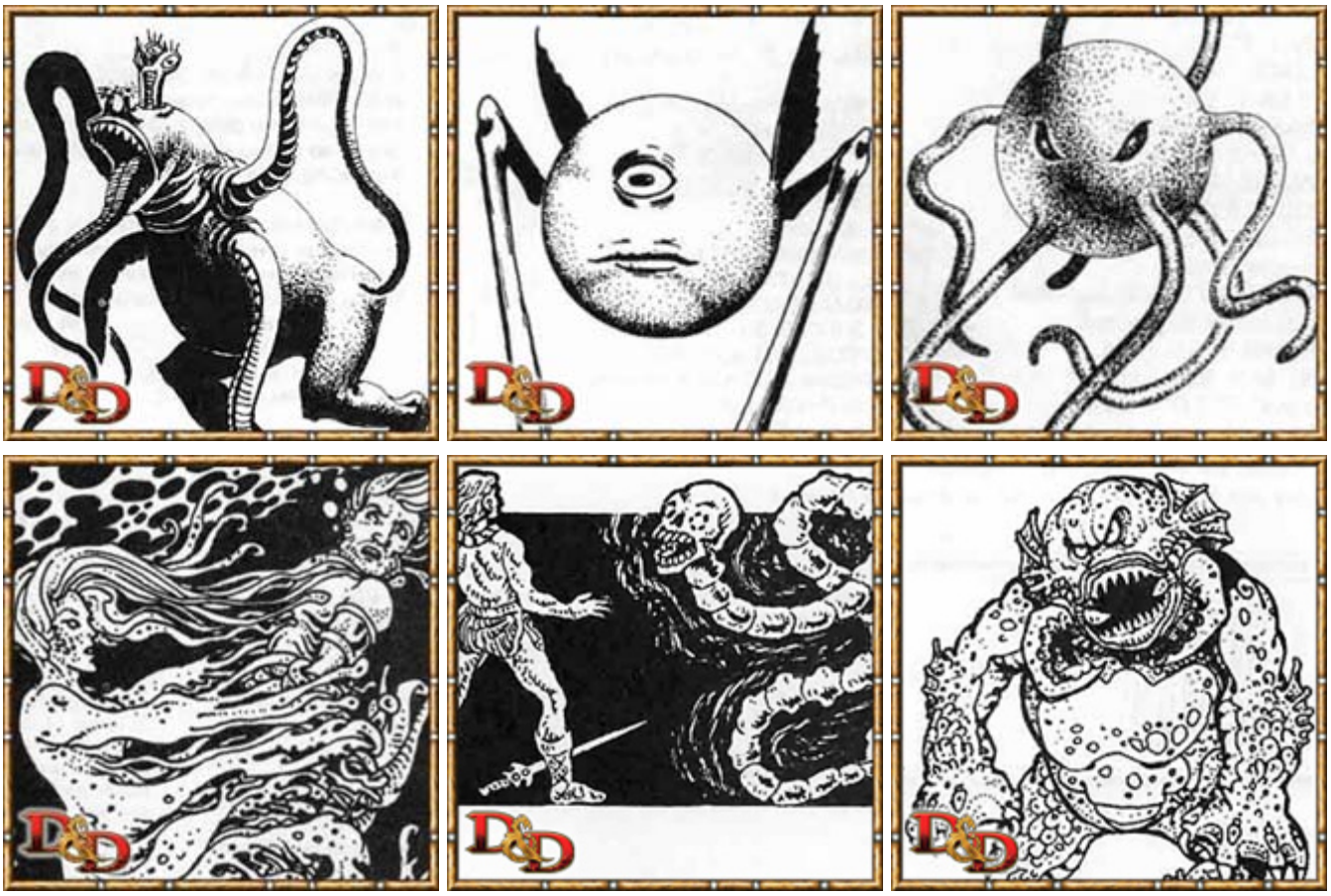
Here in the Pacific Northwest, "Nirvana" has a fairly specific connotation that involves stage-diving into drum kits, the image of a baby swimming after a dollar bill, and true rock-'n'-roll endings (in other words, not happy ones). Within the context of **Dungeons & Dragons**, however, Nirvana instead referenced Eastern philosophy: a state of mind, but adapted to the game's cosmology as one of the planes of existence. Originally, Nirvana was a plane of balance and absolute order. It was equally hot and cold, was equally light and dark, and was made of equal parts solid and liquid (wait, that's sounding a lot like the Pacific Northwest after all).

The chief inhabitants of this plane were the modrons -- and they lived in a rigid caste system under the absolute rule of Primus (and look, another rock-'n'-roll connection).

This month sees the return of modrons to the online pages of *Dungeon* magazine. For those of you not familiar with this peculiar race, we wanted to take a brief look back at these multifaceted beings (and folks, that's about as bad of a pun as I can muster).

Why Modrons?

At Gen Con 2010, Greg Bilsland led a monster design seminar, walking the audience through the creation of a monster by using an old-school monster as a template. Greg offered the following candidates for the audience's voting pleasure (roll over for information on each). The modrons won in a landslide, offering a platform that called for classifying all beings, regulating all laws, and delineating all procedures; to the modrons, obedience to the law is immediate and unquestioned -- so prepare to obey your new modron overlords! (Don't blame me -- I voted for Kodos.)



Origins and First Appearance

It's hard to think of modrons without considering Edwin Abbott's (Edwin Abbott Abbott's, to be precise) novel, Flatland. Most readers were assigned this text in college math or philosophy seminars, which concerns the character of a square exploring different planes of existence. For a mathematical text written, in part, as a commentary on Victorian society (in Flatland, different shapes occupy different social classes; the more sides a shape has, the higher his class), it remains a wonderful thought experiment. The square meets a sphere from the higher dimension of Spaceland, prompting him to ask what further dimensions there might be (of which creatures from Spaceland would be entirely ignorant). You can see this briefly animated (including concepts up to the tenth dimension) here.

Appearing in the 1st Edition *Monster Manual II*, Flatland's residents essentially became the modrons. Base modrons were organized from 1-sided (single-function monodrone spheres) to 5 (stilt-legged pentadrone starfish that could, for whatever reason, emit paralysis gas and levitate). Ruling the base modrons were hierarch modrons, which conversely started from decatons (based on the fact that there were 100, or 10x10 of them) on down to Primus (The One and the Prime). Apparently no modrons were based on negative or imaginary numbers, which would have made for interesting wars between them (or perhaps could explain rogue modrons).

Recalling the hierarchy of the Lower Planes (and the rebirthing tanks of *Battlestar Galactica*), slain modrons returned to the energy pool of Nirvana, where they reformed as new modrons. Failure to meet Primus's standards (who also happened to occupy this energy pool) also meant a return from the pool as a monodrone. But

From Jeff Grubb: The modrons first appeared in *Monster Manual II*, of which I was the "design consultant." This meant I took all the monsters, made sure they made sense and were formatted, and filled in all the missing bits. I created only a few of them: some of the daemons (charon, charonaloths, arcanaloths) and the modrons.

The modrons were a partial turnover. The monodrone (the sphere guy) was completely statted out and described. The duodrone was mostly statted out and described. The tridrone was described but not statted out. The quadrone and up were just names. I can't remember if the hierarchs had names or not, but I do know that the modron god, Primus, was my creation.

I liked the modrons because before they came along, the Lawful Neutral plane, Nirvana, was pretty durn empty. I turned it into the big clockwork universe when

serve well, and individual modrons could be promoted into higher versions.

Assuming that players would attempt to do exactly this, the *Monster Manual II* even explained that should Primus ever be slain, his second-in-commands would immediately vie for his position. This ultimate promotion would be sought by their efforts to slay as many chaotic creatures as possible…and they'd immediately judge Primus's slayers as both irredeemably chaotic and more highly valued than any other quarry.

we got to *Manual of the Planes*.

So the concept of the modrons (based on Platonic shapes), the fact they lived in Nirvana, and were Lawful Neutral were pretty much set when I got there. I am the one to blame for the more warped-looking higher level ones.

Of course, the death of Primus would set a later event into motion….

The Great Modron Migration

When it came to modron rebirths, the most dramatic one of them all came between the editions. By 2nd Edition, Nirvana itself had been renamed Mechanus—but it was here that modrons found their true fame, featuring significantly in the *Planescape* setting (with Mechanus further illustrated in the *Planes of Law* supplement). In fact, all the modrons were further illustrated, quite literally, with a new look from artist Tony DiTerlizzi, who also created new visual styles in this edition for demons and devils—excuse me, tanar'ri and baatezu—and even illustrated a number of **Magic: The Gathering** cards (particularly goblins).

Within *Planescape*, the Great March was discussed: an event that took place every 17 years, and which saw the vast mobilization of modrons tour throughout the cosmos -- for unknown reasons and with great loss of numbers. If players wished to have their characters join in the magical mystery tour of the cosmos, they need only see 2nd Edition's *The Great Modron March*, which allowed them to do just that. In this adventure, the modrons set out on their great planar migration, yet they have started it inexplicably early. Such a cosmic anomaly demands an investigation; and for parties that followed through, they would discover that this untimely march started with the death of Primus. The true secret of the Modron March (and Primus's killer), however, wouldn't be revealed until later.

The Missing Modrons

By 3rd Edition, the modrons had been completely replaced. Somewhere between the editions, the antlike formians invaded the Clockwork Nirvana of Mechanus. The only living constructs now in residence were no longer modrons at all, but the inevitables.

So what had happened to our poor modrons?

With the cosmos reset, Dave Noonan came up with the inevitables (a concept starting with the maruts, which Jeff Grubb created for 1st Edition's *Manual of the Planes*). As he detailed in *Dragon* #341, the inevitables fit the role of upholding cosmic law better. Instead of quirky little coglike modrons, monstrous inevitables would hunt down those who broke the laws of justice, didn't uphold agreements, and tried to escape the inevitability of their own mortal demise.

Although gone, modrons were not forgotten. (Far from!) A rare mention came in a 3rd Edition *Manual of the Planes* web enhancement, with Mark Jindra updating their statistics -- and reinstalling Primus back in his energy pool, right hand still swathed in bright rainbow hues, left still cloaked in inky, swirling clouds.

Later attention would have to wait until the modrons' ecology in *Dragon* #354. Written by Ken Marble, the article explained their sad exile from Mechanus, starting with the formian invasion. It also looked back at the death of Primus, revealing (from the 2nd Edition adventure, Dead Gods) that it had been the work of Orcus all along -- thought slain, but at the time in the guise of Tenebrous.

And the Great Modron March? Orcus's attempt to scour the planes for his missing wand! And with that, we look

forward to the modrons' reappearance in *Dungeon*. We also invite you to listen again to the seminar so that you can hear the discussion on how to create modrons for the current game!

Bart Carroll

Bart Carroll is neither the result of genetic experimentation by some insane wizard, nor a nightmarish creature loathsome beyond description (though he has been called both); a medium natural humanoid, he joined Wizards of the Coast in the spring of 2004. Originally producing their licensed property websites (including *Star Wars* and G.I. Joe), he transitioned to the D&D website, where he's remained part of the D&D Insider Team. In this role, he generates website content in support of the 4th Edition line of products, the online magazines, and the gamer lifestyle—of which he is an extremely proud adherent.

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